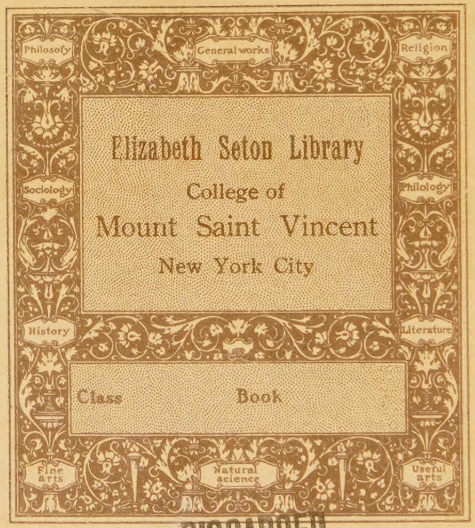
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ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

TWO SERIES OF CONFERENCES

BY

PÈRE DE RAVIGNAN, S.J.

F. X.

TRANSLATED BY

MRS. ABEL RAM

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WITH A PREFACE BY THE

REV. WILLIAM T. GORDON

OF THE LONDON ORATORY

SEVENTH EDITION

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PREFACE.

THE name of Father de Ravignan is so well known, and the Congregations of the Children of Mary have so increased in this country, that an English translation of this collection of his Conferences is sure to be welcomed by many.

It is true that they were addressed to an association of ladies in Paris, but the world of Paris is no less exacting than that of London, and what is practical to Christian women there, will be found equally so to their sisters in London. Moreover, if worldliness be the allowing ourselves to be engrossed by the interests of this life, its dangers are confined to no one country or class, and the burning words of the holy Jesuit will be as useful to the Children of Mary, whose lot is cast in the atmosphere of a crowded work-room, as to those who live in the excitement of fashionable life.

Father de Ravignan sought to save his followers from

the world, not so much by declaiming against its vices and its follies, as by striving to inspire them with a sense of the attractions of a spiritual life, and the dignity and responsibilities of the Christian state. Those, therefore, who yielded themselves to his influence, grew almost unconsciously in wisdom and in grace, and the world lost its power over them as they ceased to be attracted by its smiles, or frightened by its frowns. Not to the Apostles alone did Our Lord say, "I have called you friends, not servants." We, by our Baptism, became His members, and the fidelity He requires of us is that of friends. We know how sweet is intercourse with a friend, how we shrink from anything like disloyalty to him, and how the fear of wounding him is a more powerful motive than any dread of punishment. This is the spirit Father de Ravignan desired to form in the Children of Mary, and his words, though deprived of the grace of his presence and the music of his voice, will still produce their effect.

St. Francis de Sales, in the preface to his work on the Love of God, complains that his previous treatise on the Devout Life was not read by men, because it was addressed to Philothea, and was therefore supposed to be only intended for women, and he points out somewhat amusingly that devotion is as necessary for men as for women. In like manner it would be a mistake for men to lay aside these Conferences as not adapted to themselves. When they were preached in the chapel of the convent of the Sacred

Heart, many men obtained admission to the sacristy and side chapel, amongst whom might have been seen Marshal de Saint-Arnaud, and more than one member of the French Academy. Indeed it is hoped that this translation will help to supply a want often felt by ordinary Christians, of books fitted for the daily spiritual reading of those to whom the words of mystical writers are indeed admirable, but scarcely as yet practical.

All these Christians are Children of Mary, although they may not belong to the association which enjoys that title; to them, therefore, are addressed these words of Father de Ravignan, and his teaching will help them to fulfil more perfectly the command of their Immaculate Mother when in reference to her Divine Son she said, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye."

WILLIAM T. GORDON,
OF THE ORATORY.

PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION.

THE Instructions comprised in this little book were addressed by the Rev. Père de Ravignan to the Associates of the "*Enfants de Marie*," at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Rue de Varennes, Paris, who were chiefly composed of ladies living in the world, who had formerly been educated under its roof. They were never written down by the Rev. Father, who, from motives of humility, had a great aversion to seeing his own words in black and white, but were compiled from notes taken during the discourses, with secret, loving care by one of his hearers, and subsequently revised and edited in their due order, by one to whom every shade of style, every turn of idea, and every habitual form of speech of the illustrious preacher of Nôtre-Dame were familiar.

Some of the chapters towards the conclusion of the volume, contain instructions given to religious only, during Lenten and other retreats, which will account for

a slight difference of tone and treatment of subjects, but will be therefore none the less gladly welcomed by all general admirers of the great Jesuit, whose sainted memory is yet dear to so many pious souls.

May all those who have remained true to his teachings, may those "*Enfants de Marie*," to whom this collection is offered as a household relic, find in the distant echoes of that powerful, heart-stirring voice, a grateful remembrance of the touching, sweet, albeit severe, harmony of its language, of the many happy days, blessed by its tender, holy words of advice, and of the hopes of eternal salvation it bequeathed them as a heritage!

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SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

FIRST CONFERENCE.

ADVICE FOR THE MONTH.

WE have met together, to-day, in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to recommence, I trust with fervour, our pious exercises. We have called this first meeting in every month, when you all assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, when you all, as many as possible, should approach the Holy Altar, the monthly retreat; and now I wish to say a few words about this simple but most beneficial practice.

We know by experience that what we require above all things is to learn to know ourselves, and to find God in our own hearts. Even in a Christian, pious, and faithful life like your own, whatever gifts from heaven—and indeed they are given you in abundance—you may receive, however sincere your intentions and good-will

may be, it will happen sometimes that one loses sight of oneself, that one loses that intimate, constant thought of God, of which we stand ever in need, as our light and our guide. A yearly retreat is without doubt an excellent custom, but it is not enough: impressions fade, good fruit does not last for ever; therefore it will be well to take a few hours every month in which to renew this pious exercise. These few hours, my children, you can easily find, without their interfering in any way with your freedom. The day chosen will be sanctified by the confession of the eve and by Holy Communion; these hours which you snatch from the cares of your families and the exigencies of your position, you will employ in searching deeply into your own hearts. To explain my meaning more clearly, here are three things, three words which I recommend to your minds:

Self-Examination, Self-Mortification, Meditation.

Examine yourselves, not exactly as if for a confession which you have already made, but so as to try and give an account of the month that is passed, of the time since last you made a mental retreat.

What have you been doing? In what state is your soul? Is it in peace? Is it troubled? Are you beset by difficulties? Has God, in His grace, given you the freedom of spirit, the consolation you sought after? How are you accomplishing your duties in your position, household, family, and in general society? Has God

reason to be pleased with you? Have you been eager for His glory, for obedience to His will, for the welfare of your own soul, and the souls of those around you? Have you attended to your own personal santification? What efforts have you made in reforming your character, in overcoming your faults, in gaining the victory over your evil inclinations? God has already made known to you in various ways the necessities of your soul, and since then have you been watchful over yourself? Have you not sometimes gone on from day to day, without once stopping to recollect yourself? And then what became of all your good impressions and good resolutions? How do you now stand with God? Have you made any progress? or have you abandoned your soul, your mind, and your heart, like an untilled field, where thorns and brambles choke the good seed? Have you cultivated the virtues which God implanted in your soul? What remains now to be done? What means must you take, with regard to your besetting sin, the one point of daily, hourly urgency? Have you fought against it? Have you given it a thought? Tell me—have you done all this?

Ought we not then, thus to retire into the solitude of our own hearts, to examine, and to conquer ourselves? And wherefore? To deplore over the evil we have done, to repent of it; but never to be discouraged, never to stand still; on the contrary, to fortify ourselves by

meditating upon the fresh graces God never refuses to grant us. And do you not believe that the sight of a soul thus recollected, thus occupied in the midst of the bustle and confusion of the world, is an agreeable sight in the eyes of the Lord, of the holy angels, and of Mary the Immaculate Virgin, as they look down upon it in love and in joy?

I have only given you an outline of this first exercise, but you will understand from it, that the retreat I am recommending to you, consists in giving a few hours in the day, to serious examination of your souls, minds, and hearts.

In the second place, I said you must mortify yourselves. To do this is the Christian law, the precept of the Gospel, is what our Saviour came to teach us, what He practised Himself, what was repeated by the Apostles, what the Saints have ever followed. Therefore we should ask ourselves, how we stand with regard to Christian mortification. I am not going to speak to you of extraordinary austerities, such as are practised in the cloister, and such as we read of in the lives of the Saints; no, mortification is for all conditions, all ages, all states of life; it is a duty, a necessity, a law. Without mortification, what would there be in our hearts but bad passions and inclinations? Without mortification, we have no power, no dominion over ourselves: without mortification, instead of grace reigning within us, direct-

ing and leading us, we are governed by our own faulty natures, our passing impressions, our earthly affections, and by prejudice instead of by sound reason. Mortification consists in eradicating what is evil, defective, and opposed to the grace of God within us. Mortification means that which kills, annihilates, and utterly uproots, as far as possible, the wicked instincts of our human nature.

Well, then! The careful self-examination you have now made, must have shown you what progress you have made, that is, it must have made clear to you what faults you have to fight against and to overcome, and in what ways you are to mortify yourself. Have you done this? Is there not still a great portion of your life given over to chance, to carelessness, to self-abandonment? Is it indeed the Spirit of Faith which animates you? That Spirit which will sanctify you, keep you pure, and fill you with the Spirit of the Gospel and of the Heart of Jesus. Ah! my children, where are we at this moment? You now see that what we have to think of, to reflect upon, and to accomplish, is the victory over ourselves.

To the greater number of Christian souls, the word mortification has something strange and alarming about it; a something which we do not like to think about, which we are afraid to approach. That there are happy exceptions I know full well; there are pure and innocent souls who know how to regulate themselves, and to mortify themselves, who bear patiently with ill-humour, bad

temper, daily worry and annoyances; who seek not their own personal gratification and comfort, but who live by Faith, and walk in the path which their Divine Saviour has traced for them. Yes, indeed I know the world does present some such examples, but how rare they are! How many cowardly spirits do we find, lax with themselves, irritated by the smallest obstacle, obeying their own faulty natures, and weeping and lamenting because they find difficulty inseparable from duty and the practice of a holy life!

You must therefore withdraw yourselves into the solitude of your own hearts to converse with God, and you will see then whether time is wanting for this day of recollection. You will learn then in silence, to practise true mortification, to conquer yourself, to submit yourself to the Will of Our Blessed Lord. And whenever you gain some hardly-fought victory, when you have thoroughly undertaken the combat against your own self, against your inclinations, your senses, your evil habits, when you are thus armed with courage, ah! you have already felt, you know, you feel, what peace, what consolation, what joy—the only real and lasting joy—will be yours!

But this is not all: this is not enough; in order to examine and know yourself thoroughly, in order to mortify and conquer yourself, you must pray, or else you will fail, and gain no fruit from your efforts; you must

say to yourself every day, "without prayer I can do nothing." Now by prayer, I do not mean a few words repeated mechanically, without real devotion, but I mean that utterance from the heart, which reflects, which meditates, which is nourished upon the lessons of Faith, upon the truths of the Gospel, and which excites and raises all our affections towards Our Lord, so that he may deign to strengthen and to bless us. This, my children, is meditation. You see it is not a thing which requires great disturbance of mind, it is not a study, it is not a labour. Nevertheless we all find great difficulty in spiritual recollection, and are subject to a thousand distractions. The Saints themselves experienced this. Hardly for one minute together can we think of God alone; we want courage and a holy energy. Let us withdraw from the world, and take some good book, which is like a friend to us; we read in it how God inspired the Saints, we observe the teachings of truth and of Eternal Wisdom; after which we apply these things to ourselves, and ask ourselves, "How then do I stand? What is most important for me to do in my life? Is the thought of God always present with me? Do I think about Him at all? Do I live, do I suffer for Him alone? Is it for Him I act? Do I offer Him all my actions of the day, my whole existence?"

This prayer, meditated upon, is our food and strength, and according to the rule of the *Enfants de Marie*, you

ought to be faithful to this short daily meditation; do not imagine it is a great thing I am asking of you; no! it is a simple, easy practice: unfortunately you have always some pretext to avoid doing it, and I fear that it is often neglected.

Well, then! This very day, the first of a fresh month, of which you are about to make a retreat, of which you ought to take advantage for the welfare of your soul, meditate! Seek out some corner of a church, some chapel, where you will be alone with God, or if it must be at your own home, and you are fearful of being disturbed, hide yourself, lock yourself in, see that your privacy be respected. In spite of all the obstacles, repugnances and impossibilities, which you know how to erect, as it were, into a barrier against meditation; when you shall have, once every month, found three or four hours, and faithfully given them to your meditation, believe me, the light of Heaven and our Saviour's grace will not fail to come to your assistance. Are they not worth seeking for? Do you not think that you will find in them a recompense, and consolation sufficient to reward you for your trouble? This meditation is the halting-place, the repose necessary to the traveller; it is the request of him who desires to receive; it is the alms of the rich: you are poor, very poor; it is God who is rich, and He wishes to give you the alms of His treasures and of His riches. But what can a frivolous, worldly, thoughtless soul hope

to obtain? That soul is not prepared to be the receptacle of God's graces; there they are, waiting those graces, like a fertilizing and refreshing dew, and there is no one to receive them!

You know St. Theresa's vision, in which she beheld Our Saviour hovering in the air over a great city; His hands were filled with blessings and heavenly graces; He sought for one that thinketh in his heart, but found none; not one house, not one heart desirous of accepting His gifts! We ourselves deplore over this negligence; let us then seek to make reparation for it, by taking a firm and generous resolution to feed and strengthen our own souls by meditation on the divine truths. Here, then, my children, are the few words I had to say to you, a few counsels I wish to recommend to you; believe me, this practice of a retreat is useful, I may almost say necessary in a life spent in the world; accept it as it is, simple and sweet, easy and profitable to the soul.

Remember that even whilst I am speaking to you, the hours pass, and time rolls on; others younger than we have preceded us in life and in death, and it is high time to think of, and prepare ourselves by serious reflection, for that journey, whose end is union with God, Whom we have wished to serve and love, and Whom we are intended to possess to all eternity.

SECOND CONFERENCE.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DAY.

I WISH, my children, to say a few words to you about the principal actions of the day, for the work of our sanctification materially depends upon the manner in which we acquit ourselves of the ordinary duties of our state. We very rarely are called upon to perform extraordinary acts of heroism, great works, or tremendous sacrifices. Such may happen to be our case; but in the ordinary actions of each day, in the task of each hour as it comes, in what composes our habitual life—*there* is where we truly find matter for the practice of our religion. This is what we must ever bear in mind, in order to rest contented where God has placed us, in order to do well what we have to do, in order to try and accept every day as a gift from God.

Let us begin the inspection of our day together. This evening I am going to talk to you about our waking moments—about nothing else—that first hour of the day in which we recommence our life—for what is sleep but a

faithful picture of death. There is therefore one moment, the moment when we return to consciousness, when God gives us back to ourselves, to our duties, to our sufferings often, but also to Himself and to our vocation in the world. This first moment is of great importance; too often we use it badly, and our spirit, in consequence, takes a wrong direction the whole day long. As soon as you awake, as soon as you begin to think, as soon as you are prepared to act, what have you to do? A thousand thoughts cross your brain, a thousand follies, recollections of the evening before, often annoying and wearisome anxieties for the future, troubles of conscience or of the heart, and very often matters of exterior, worldly interest —already idle words, multiplying in thought. When it is necessary to collect your ideas, to remember where you are before you enter upon this re-existence, receiving it for the first time, like the first man from the hand of God, you expend your mind like a fountain, which overflows and runs to waste, from want of giving a regular channel to your thoughts and wishes.

What then must you do? The welfare of your day and its real sanctification depend assuredly upon the first thoughts and dispositions of your heart when you awake. What you have to do at this moment is, (to put it very simply) to overcome the laziness too often found at our bedside, with which we dispute and pro-

crastinate only to be beaten in the end. Here is a sacrifice to make; we must try to be diligent, to rise at a proper hour; reasons of health may cause this hour to vary, but be on your guard against idleness, sloth, and carelessness, you who do not know how to offer this early morning's self-denial with courage and fidelity.

And your first thoughts, what are they? Towards what objects does your mind first turn? whither is it bent? Even when awake you may go on dreaming, and dream away for hours. What you have to do is to make a habit, as soon as you can think, as soon as the conscience of your life is restored to you, of offering yourself to God, of giving yourself to God, of giving Him that heart, and those thoughts which belong to Him. This mind, He gave you; this heart He causes to beat; this hour, this very day are gifts from Him; well then, here lies in all its truth, and in all its force, the duty of seeking the Lord, of offering your all to Him, of giving Him His own, and of returning Him what is His due.

Whatever you did yesterday, whatever may be the troubles and difficulties in store for to-day, they must wait; their time will come. The present moment belongs to God alone! And this is why Scripture speaks of the Morning Sacrifice.

See! all nature awakens with you, or rather before you, and offers herself to God in her own language. Your soul must do the same; I repeat this is a duty. When once

you have thus carried your heart to the feet of God, it is like a well-regulated clock, like an impetus given, a movement which continues of itself; it is a road which you have opened, and which you can follow faithfully. If from this first moment, the hands do not point to the hour of God, if the movement be not true, if the road which leads to God be not taken, where shall you go? what will mark your hours? How will it be with your minutes?

Sad indeed will it be for you! You will resemble the wind that blows, a leaf carried hither and thither, the dust which rises and disappears. Nothing, nothing real, nothing solid! Take care! Take care and begin your day as a Christian should!

But what is there to hinder you? I speak of a very short time, preceding or else accompanying your rising; of two or three minutes only. I merely ask of you one short minute of silence and recollection. Do not begin the ordinary course of your thoughts and words the very instant you awake. No: be silent for a little while, and give to God, in the fulness of your heart, this existence, this liberty of spirit which He has bestowed on you. Ah! during the day you may meet with full many an obstacle and stumbling block, against which you must be prepared; but believe me, always begin by offering yourself to your Lord, by declaring yourself His property, by vowing obedience and fidelity to Him.

Lose sight of your anticipated troubles, they will speedily find you again: do not even think of your faults; give yourself wholly to God; say to Him: "My God, take me! I am Thine alone! My Lord, here I am ready to do Thy Will!"

This, my children, is not so very difficult to do; it is nothing extraordinary or impracticable, it is not the perfection of a saint, it is merely the simplicity of a child, who offers, who gives himself to his Father. I will add yet this; you have a Mother who reigns in Heaven. Let Her name be one of the first upon your lips—one of the first to sound in your ears.—Holy Mary, conceived without sin, pray for me! Keep me under your protection! I am your child, preserve me evermore!

These are practices, which do enormous good to the soul, my children; they are small things in appearance, but in reality are of the greatest, grandest importance, since they put us in communication with God, and are a link between us and Heaven; do them then, I entreat you, and do them well.

There is one thing more, I must add to what I have already told you, in order that you may sanctify your day; I have not yet come to prayer, we have only to do as yet, with your waking moments and your rising.

You ought, even before saying your prayers, (which I hope you do not leave till late in the morning) before your meditation and other devotions, when offer-

ing your heart to God and to Mary, to turn your attention to the particular and pressing need which should form the subject of your special examination. You have a ruling passion, a besetting sin to overcome, habitual faults to reproach yourself with, perhaps discomforts and trials to encounter in your home; you have to lay in a stock of meekness and patience; and who has not need of patience in this life? you have duties to fulfil, the Will of God to seek and to find. Well, one thing and one thing only, ought to be before your mind; you ought to say: "I will watch; I will fight; I will pray to conquer myself, to rule myself and to submit myself to God. Once, at the least, in the middle of the day, I will try to secure ten minutes, five minutes, when I will meditate within myself upon what is the special need of my soul; when I will examine myself upon the hours spent; and then when night comes I will ponder again in spirit over this thought, which, from the early morning, ought to suceed the first Sacrifice of rising."

All that this requires is little time, but a firm determination to seek God and to love Him.

My children, try it, try, I say; and, before we proceed together to consider the actions of the day itself, make this very day a resolution to have, as far as it lies in your power, a fixed hour for rising. Believe me, it is idleness, negligence and self-indulgence, which more or less lead you all astray, and the devil loves idleness,

so that if we begin by serving him as soon as we awake, he will be our master throughout the day. Diligence, on the contrary, gives renewed vigour and fills the soul with joy.

Take then the resolution, I entreat of you, my children, to offer yourselves to Jesus the very first moment of your awakening, and then to Mary. After that, reflect on the great need of your soul, the virtue in which you are most wanting, the fault which you have to conquer.

When this first minute has been thus employed, you feel inclined for prayer, prepared for meditation; your mind has lost nothing, it is well regulated, and you do not begin your day by a loss of time.

Think over these few words I have recommended to you, and when we are receiving the Benediction of Our Blessed Lord, beg of Him to imprint them on your hearts, and ask of Him, as an especial grace, to enable you thus to sanctify the first moments of the day.

THIRD CONFERENCE.

ON PRAYER.

ONE thought, my children, forces itself upon me, and occupies me, when I am seeking before God for a subject on which to talk to you. I ask myself from the depths of my soul, what will be the most useful to you, what will be the means of bringing you most benefit into your spiritual life, what will most further your sanctification and the works which God has put into your hands? Well, I am always obliged to return to one word, which embraces everything; it has an irresistible attraction for me, and that word is, *prayer*. Oh! I know you pray; you are exact in saying your prayers, they have their appointed place in your day; but tell me, is there not something more to do still, something to do, so that your prayer may be yet more acceptable to God, yet more efficacious, and may correspond yet more and more with your veritable wants? I do not mean to give you an instruction on prayer, you do not require one; but I wish to remind you of a few considerations, which will assure the fruits

of your spiritual exercises. What ought to be your prayer, you who follow a Christian and pious path? Three things I have to tell you upon this subject, three kinds of prayer to put before you.

Prayer should be the occupation of your heart; prayer should be the desire of your heart; prayer should be the strength of your heart.

Firstly, then, prayer ought to be the occupation of your heart.—There is a truly sad passage in Scripture, in the words of the Prophet, "With desolation is the land made desolate, because there is none that thinketh in his heart," nevertheless when Jeremias said thus, the Jews prayed, there was a religion, there were sacrifices, psalms were said and sung, and yet the Prophet said: "With desolation is the land made desolate, because there is none that thinketh in his heart." Ah! what we want is, that prayer shall be the occupation of the heart, that it shall be *interior;* it must penetrate to the most hidden recesses of the soul, and must there seek our best and warmest affections. Our prayer is our relationship with God, our conversation, our communing with our Creator, our Father, our Sovereign Lord. Above all, it must be the language of our heart. Now then, tell me, do you give your whole heart to prayer? Has prayer the foremost place in your heart? Are you attached to prayer, as your greatest treasure? Is prayer ever the expression of the feelings of your heart, of

your love, of your will, of your generous determination? For the *heart* means all that.

Are your prayers never subject to the distractions, the frivolities, the impressions of the world? Is it truly your heart which prays, and is it really occupied with God alone in prayer? Not always, and yet, what else have we to do upon earth? If you pray well, all is safe; if you pray badly, carelessly, thoughtlessly, you suffer, you are wanting in grace, you fall.

By the words, occupation of the heart, I do not mean, merely a few words passing our lips, a few vocal prayers, very holy and very good, which assuredly we must not neglect to say; the prayer of which I am speaking is not that. This prayer, this possession of the heart is above all, understand me well, *meditation*; I repeat again and again at the risk of wearying you, you must meditate.

Shall I tell you all my thoughts? Why are you here? Why am I here myself? Why are we all united here, under the name, so holy and so touching, of "*Enfants de Marie*," to which you rightly attach so great importance, which your faith and your piety hold so dear? Why, of a certainty, we are here to do something which shall bring us still nearer to God, which shall advance us in the paths of God and in the sanctification of our souls; and therefore, my children, the first habit which ought to distinguish you in a life in the world, which ought to mark you with a seal of piety—let us repeat it, let us

never cease repeating it—is meditation, that blessed occupation of the heart.

But difficulties present themselves, and obstacles and impossibilities, and often—is it not so?—a want of will. Ah! at least, when we recommence our spiritual exercises every year, let this be our first resolution, let this be the first of the results we have obtained.

You have made this resolution whilst in retreat; oh! then you assuredly cannot be neglectful of prayer; I do not suppose that you are wanting in prayer, but do you pray well? Do you pray with your heart, your will, your sincere determination? I do not ask if you are subject to distractions, it is impossible that it should not be so sometimes, but I ask if your intention is good, if you give your whole heart, I ask if you truly seek God in prayer and in the reflections which you impose upon yourself? Everything lies in this, for a carefully meditated, recollected prayer ought to be the first occupation of the heart.

In the second place, prayer ought to be the desire of your heart. Permit me to ask you: when you pray, is it a real desire of your heart you offer to God? Do you really wish for the graces, for the good gifts which our Blessed Lord is willing to give you, and of which you are in so great need. Is nothing else nearer to your heart than His grace, than His love? Where is your heart when you pray? Is it all given to God? For this

is what God exacts; thus it is that man finds favour in His sight, as we are told in the Gospel. This is what, in former days, was the desire of the saints, and of the just, under the Old Law; this is what was the desire of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, when, before the birth of our Saviour, she worshipped Him, longed for Him, and unceasingly implored His blessings. Do you ardently desire, do you long for the coming of your Lord within your own hearts? Do you desire His grace? Do you desire to receive the gifts of heaven? Do you wish to fight against your enemy who is tempting you? Do you wish to grow better every day? Do you ask God to make you better, with fervour? Tell me honestly, is your prayer the conscientious, the sacred desire of your heart? Is your heart never cold, nor agitated by the distractions and preoccupations of the world?

I know that many legitimate sources of affliction may prey upon your mind; but just on that account is why you need so much grace to console you, to fortify your soul; it is grace you must desire. Ask for this grace; ask for the graces of patience and meekness which will sanctify your life and your mission in your own home. Ask of God a thousand times a day that you may keep watch over yourself, that you may be calm, submissive . . . . . Do you ever beg this grace of Him, do you ever seek to obtain it? No, not half enough; if your efforts are not crowned with success, do not be cast down, for your wil

was good: you wanted more prayer—prayer was not the grand desire of your heart; if it were so, you would not pray once only in the morning, but a hundred times a day.

And now, what is perseverance? My children, it is, first of all, the multiplicity of requests. Does not God wish to be importuned by us? Has not our Blessed Saviour Himself said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you?" You knock once, and that is all; it is not enough. God appears to keep the gate closed, but His Heart is open; it is to try you, to make you persevere, that He delays; and you are faint and discouraged: you do not add prayer to prayer, you leave off your entreaties altogether. How, then, is the infallible promise to be fulfilled?

Prayer is the heart's desire. You must throw yourself wholly and entirely into the arms of Faith, and above all, trust in the assistance of grace. There is not one of you who has not some soul near and dear to her to regain, some heart to save, some conversion to effect; a father, brother, husband, sons, friends, to pray for, how can I tell? Is your heart really desirous? Yes, it is; but does this desire pursue you, does it animate you? Do you weary Heaven with your importunities? Do you suffer? Do you weep? Do you persevere?

In conclusion . . . . Prayer is the strength of the heart. Yes, of course you wish to be faithful, more

than that, you wish to make progress, I do not doubt you for a moment, you wish the work of God to be complete within you. But where is your strength? What is it upon which you lean to enable you to edify others, to spread the Love of Christ, and to preach to others by the mere force of your example? Where is your strength, where is your light? Do you seek for them in the Heart of your Saviour? Do you often pronounce His name? Look and see whether in your sorrows and anxieties, in your duties of social condition, your relations of family and society, in your griefs and your joys, you are not guided by your own wisdom, and led by your own thoughts. How can you expect thus to arrive at your goal? If you wish to reach it, make a firm and steadfast resolution, and say to yourself that there is one thing you *must* do: pray! It must be a constant habit with you; your heart must always be taking this direction, must ever find in it a refuge in the midst of work and of difficulties. And why do not you make a habit of having recourse to Mary, of invoking her sacred name, of flying to her protection? Do not you too often set forth with your own strength, your own reasonings, your own calculations? And what do they all amount to? To weakness, delusions of human nature. You will never succeed. The straight road, the short road, the infallible road to success is—prayer.

All these things, my children, you are well acquainted

with; they are dear to you; you love prayer. But how do we need to be reminded of these things, as we advance in life! I will tell you, as we are here *en famille*, that during the whole of my priesthood, this is what I have had to repeat oftenest to myself. When this poor instrument of God's hand trembles before some obstacle, I do not resort to human means of assistance; I fall upon my knees before my Lord, and prostrate before the image of Mary, implore of her heart to strengthen me. I repeat, prayer is the sole consolation which can succour us here on earth. Prayer from the heart is the sole remedy of all evils, is balm for every wound, is the means wherewith to accomplish all we can desire.

Well, then! my children, I entreat you to be a confraternity of prayer, children of prayer; love the prayer from the heart, and do not pray night and morning only, but often during the day, whenever you are agitated by the turmoil of the world. This is all that I have to tell you to-day, and now we will pray together, and put ourselves together at the feet of God. Time runs on swiftly, and as we are approaching many subjects of pious meditation in our retreat, we must prepare ourselves for them, and how shall we do so unless by prayer, that occupation of the heart, that true desire of the heart, that moulding of the heart, which will be our consolation upon earth, and merit for us the happiness of heaven.

FOURTH CONFERENCE.

FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION. JESUS CHRIST, KING AND VICTIM.

THE prophet announced a glorious day, which he hailed with all the transports of hope and delight: it was that upon which the Sovereign Lord, the Ruler of the universe, was to be presented in His own Temple, to take possession of it anew.

You know, my children, that this ambassador of God, this Redeemer, this long prophesied Messiah, did not appear clothed in the attributes of terror. No, on the contrary, he was depicted in advance as a King of Peace, filled with majesty, but a majesty of sweetness and compassion. We are to-day celebrating the realization of this prophecy; the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple remind us of this offering which Jesus Christ came Himself to make—an offering of Himself. He came, as He tells us so often, from His Father, to do His Will, to obey His wishes, to accomplish His commands. He came also to offer

Himself to the world, in this ancient Temple, where there were gathered together all ages and all conditions: the venerable Simeon, Anna the Prophetess, Mary bearing her Son in her arms, Joseph, the holy angels accompanying them and contemplating them from the heights of heaven, worshipping Jesus as He gave Himself to the whole world, that world which He came to bless and to redeem.

This picture, I think, will suggest to us many useful points of consideration.

Jesus Christ offered Himself to the world, and is still offering Himself every day; He presents Himself, He comes as the King of Peace, as the long-expected sovereign; He comes to dispense His graces, His benefits; but is it not true that we may say now of His coming, what the Apostle St. John wrote in the beginning of his Gospel, that Jesus Christ came into the world and His own received Him not, that the world has not known Him? and we may add, in the words of St. Paul, that the world was not worthy of Him. Therefore, this Divine Saviour, filled with mercy, indulgence, and tenderness, at the sight of this world which rejected Him, which would not accept His graces, found Himself forced to exclaim, "Woe unto the world!" and repeated several times in accents of bitterness, whilst the tears coursed down His cheeks, "Woe unto the world! woe unto the world!"

Yes, indeed, my children, when I see Jesus Christ ever thus rejected, I cannot help being profoundly and truly distressed; for Christ does yet offer Himself to the world: He comes to us every day, as on the first day of His appearing. He is King of Heaven and earth, Sovereign Lord, and yet He will not reign by His might, by His power, by His justice, or by the threatenings of fear! But the world has not known Him, it does not yet belong to Him, it has not yet recognized Him!

Tell me, when you are in the midst of this world, can you truthfully say that Jesus Christ is received and accepted, that His laws are fulfilled, that His Spirit is loved and revered? Ah! we who do not mix with the world, who only catch the sound of its distant murmurs, we yet hear enough to make us weep and lament before Our Lord. What are its habits, what its customs? God grant that they were only the results of thoughtlessness and frivolity! But no; the chosen pasture upon which the world loves to feed is *scandal.* Here is the world, to which Jesus Christ presents Himself as King: no, indeed He reigns not here, He meets with the same answer as that of the blasphemous Jews of old—we will not have Him to reign over us! Ah! my children, you who are faithful and pure, you who walk in the Christian path, take care, take care, that by your conversation, by your actions, by your whole conduct, you may be recognized as having received Jesus Christ, when He presented

Himself to you, your King and your Master, that the world may know you have not disowned Him. Then put this wretched love of scandal far away from you; fly from these poisonous stories which can but embitter your hearts; say to yourselves in the depths of your souls, "Yes, I desire that Jesus Christ shall reign within me!" When sorrowful sights of sin meet your eyes, when sad propositions fall upon your ears, know how to turn away your eyes so that they may rest upon Jesus, and shut your ears to listen to His voice alone.

Jesus Christ offers Himself yet as victim to the world; and the world accepts Him as such. But in what sense? In that sense in which the world has covered Him with opprobrium, contempt, and outrage. When I contemplate the idle, careless, unbelieving life of the world, I say to myself: "Yes, Jesus is in very deed the world's victim! Yes, He reigns in its scorn and its contempt! Yes, the joy of the world is indeed the cruel triumph of the persecutor over the victim, that joy so painful to see, so deeply insulting to the Heart of Jesus Christ!"

You, my children, by your faith and your religion, know the sacred meaning of the word victim; you accept Jesus Christ as your victim; yes, to love and to bless Him, to unite yourself to His expiation, to His prayer, to His penance, to His immolation. When, in course of a few moments, this Divine Saviour is offered up for you

upon this Altar, when He descends into your hearts, say to yourselves that you are receiving a Divine Victim, a Royal Victim, Him whom the world rejected and crucified ; vow to yourselves to guard Him, to preserve Him within you, in order to love Him always. And when Jesus Christ offers Himself to-day in His Temple, when Mary presents Him in her arms, Mary the Blessed, Mary the Glorious, whose heart is nevertheless transfixed with a sword—whilst the Church recalls to mind these glorious recollections, accept Jesus as victim, and seek in your hearts, from the innermost recesses of your hearts, what you also have to sacrifice to Him.

Without doubt, you already have the wish to serve Jesus Christ, to obey His Gospel, to follow the lessons of your Lord ; but alas ! how are you hampered by illusions and incessant distractions ! Obstacles stop you at every footstep. Where is the soul devoted to Jesus Christ, wholly surrendered to the Heart of Jesus, uniting itself to His sacrifice with confidence and love ?

Arouse then, I conjure you, all your faith and all your zeal, when you see Jesus offended and misunderstood amongst you, when He is so seldom accepted, as He stands offering Himself and presenting Himself without ceasing to the world. Do you, my children, try to receive Him, and to impress feelings of loving courage in your hearts. Ah ! turn from the bondage of created things ; try to rise by faith, if it is only for a few short

moments, above this earth and its trivial interests, to where Jesus Christ reigns, to where He offers Himself, and intercedes for us unceasingly; ascend there and repose yourselves upon Him.

To-day especially, you are bound to accept the offering full and entire of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives Himself to you as King and as Victim. He reigns as King; He immolates Himself as Victim; He is King to bless you, to shower upon you the riches of His gifts; Victim to expiate your offences, to cleanse you from your sins, to gain for you the strength and the graces which you require. King, to await you in Heaven, and to place a crown upon your head; Victim, to compassionate your sorrows, to lighten your woes, to recompense you for the cruel deceptions ever to be found in this world. Accept Him then as King and as Victim, in faith and in love; never separate these two titles.

Beg of your Mother to offer you to her Son, even as she offered Him to His Father, and then this prayer granted will be your happiness; your peace will be unalloyed, nothing will trouble you; you will find help and consolation during the course of your earthly pilgrimage, and when you have reached its term, you will everlastingly bless these days in which you devoted yourselves to the service of the Lord, and to the accomplishment of His Holy Will.

FIFTH CONFERENCE.

ON DEVOTION.

MY CHILDREN—There is one sentence in the Gospel upon which I am now going to ask you to meditate. Our Lord spoke several times of a treasure we were to seek, and repeated this injunction many times. You remember the words, "Seek ye therefore first the Kingdom of God." When Our Lord, too, speaks of prayer, He uses the same expression, "Seek, and you shall find!" I am truly struck by this pressing manner in which Our Lord invites us to seek for His gifts and His treasures, and I wish that you may be the same; I ask myself whether you do seek for the gifts of God with sufficient ardour. To-day, I wish to specify with you, precisely, what you must endeavour to acquire; and by the invitations of the Saints, it seems to me that there is truly a great blessing, and a great grace, which we must seek indefatigably. Yes, I am convinced that in our relations with Our Lord, and in our spiritual exercises, we do not know how to seek! Ah! we know

how to persevere in things of the world; in our earthly affections, we are not afraid of preoccupations nor of fatigue; but the good things of God, the gift of God, that gift of which I am going to speak to you, we do not seek after. This reminds us of the words Jesus spake to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well-side, "If thou didst know the gift of God!"

Well, then! here is what we have to seek and to ask for, and I beg of you, my children, to give it your whole attention.

We often complain that we have no attraction to prayer and to spiritual things; well! certainly if one thing is needful, it is this attraction, this taste, this unction in holy things; yes, indeed, for if that is wanting, many other things will be wanting besides, for what one does unwillingly, against the grain, one does badly, or at any rate the task is a painful one, and courage often fails for its accomplishment. In that case we drag ourselves wearily along instead of flying eagerly to prayer, to meditation, to communion even. By an unfortunate error, many think that to gain this unction, this fervour in religion, to find *the devotion* so precious in our relations with God, our own unassisted efforts will suffice; and so they fatigue themselves, become disgusted and discour aged. Now that is not the way to set to work, my children; devotion is a gift of God, a gift of the Holy Ghost; it is His special mission to give us this attraction

to holy things, this love which is to lead our hearts up to heaven. Devotion is a hidden treasure, a chosen grace which God reserves for the souls who love Him. He alone can give them this inclination, this fervour, this attraction. He will not exempt them from trials and from crosses, but He will cause them to feel this heavenly want in the very depths of their hearts. Some chosen soul, immersed perhaps in desolation, in trouble, and in weakness, will feel itself irresistibly drawn to repose in God; and if even there it is still sorrowful (for it is possible to love and yet to be in sorrow) it will none the less devotedly clasp the feet of Jesus. In the things of this world, it does not do to be always thinking of our troubles; we must sometimes put them on one side and forget them; it is often bad for us to be wrapped up in our griefs: but in the things of God, on the contrary, if we find a difficulty in conversing with Him, and in thinking of Him, here is a trouble which we must learn to bear, to court, and to love. Then, contradictory as it may seem, our hearts will be filled at one and the same time with grief and with joy, with pain and yet with a holy unction! Whatever be your path in life, my children, you will need the aid of this Divine Unction; for what life, smooth and fair as it may appear on the surface, is not traversed by many a trial, many a sorrow? . . . . My children, I cannot take one step, I cannot listen to the secrets of one soul, without meeting

with pain and affliction! trials everywhere, discontent everywhere! Where is the family that is not thus visited from heaven? Therefore, to endure our lives, and to sanctify them, we must seek, sincerely seek before God, for this taste, this attraction, this love of holy things. Do not be afraid; ask and you will obtain. Importune Our Blessed Lord, put all your heart, all your courage, into the task. Do not be timid, do not be disheartened. Beg of the Holy Ghost, and of the Heart of Jesus Who has promised us His love and support, to give you the grace of holy devotion.

Yes, I affirm from long experience (and more intensely than ever have I brought back this conviction of a heavenly want from my recent week's retreat) that if there is one thing necessary to our existence, one treasure which we are bound to desire, and to use every exertion to attain, that thing is, devotion; and do not in this instance be fearful of tempting the Lord; do not be afraid of seeking your own self too much. Oh! without a doubt, we must not wish to serve God solely for our own consolation and for our own personal satisfaction! That would be egoism, and we must put the accomplishment of God's Will, His glory, and His Kingdom in the first place; but also, by reason of our infirmities and our weakness, and in order the better to establish His Kingdom in our hearts, we must be filled, not now and then, but always

and for ever with the love, and sweetness, and unction of a holy devotion.

Well, then, when you begin your prayers, desire to find this holy unction; when you take up a spiritual book, prepare to find it there; in spite of the intractableness of your own heart, in spite of the perturbation and disquietude of your nature, try to find therein sweetness and peace.

Besides, we must all have a vocation in life. What do you wish yours to be? Must it be the world, with its false, deceitful joys and seductions? It is near enough to you, but accompanied ever by the pain, disorder and remorse which God in His mercy has attached to its paths. Do you, on the contrary, desire to submit yourself to your Lord? Do you wish to serve Him, do you wish to seek Him in the sincerity of your heart? Follow Him, importune Him, and you will find Him, He will come to you and make your heart His dwelling-place. Oh! happy hour! What a blessed moment it is, when a soul is admitted to this love of heavenly things, and to this solid devotion, which binds it securely to Jesus and to the love of His law! Outside that law, my children, you will never find true consolation, nor the support you require; satisfaction, strength, and even courage will be wanting. But if you have sought and received from God this sacred gift, if piety is dear to you, if all the inclinations of your heart are bent firmly in this

direction; oh! then you have indeed a safe and ever open refuge. Truly this is a secret you must learn.

And, again, tell me, why are you here? Wherefore have you made the choice of belonging to this devout confraternity? Why are you *Enfants de Marie?* Wherefore these frequent communions which are our consolation and our joy? Wherefore indeed, unless to learn to devote yourselves, to bind yourselves by a true and faithful affection, by the warmest affections of your hearts, to the things which are God's? Without a doubt, every day will have its sacrifices. This poor heart will meet with a thousand deceptions, appearances will mislead it, difficulties will hinder it; but nevertheless, a day will come, a great day, bringing deliverance on its wings; and that day is the one in which you will have thoroughly learnt the sweetness of this gift from your Lord, to feed upon His life, to live in Him, hear Him, and never to leave Him more.

You ask me, my children, how you are to gain this most precious gift; to which I reply, at the end of this our conference, as I spoke to you at its commencement: the work is not one we are capable of accomplishing by ourselves, in our own strength; it is not a plant which we can sow and afterwards gather upon our own soil. Our poverty-stricken ground produces no such plants, it is too barren, too ungrateful: no, this gift comes from Heaven like a fertilizing dew from a Divine source;

seek it therefore where it is to be found. To seek for grace, my children, is to desire it, to value it, and to appreciate it at its full and true worth. Do you value it above everything? Do you hold it dearer than anything else in the world? Tell me, should you be happy if you really and truly loved God with all your soul? Would you wish to belong to Him in such a manner that there should be nothing more upon earth which could disturb or preoccupy you so as to prevent your giving Him the first place in everything? If it is so, then you cannot fail to ask God for these holy graces in which you are wanting.

Well, then, ask for devotion, and never cease asking for it. Do not be discouraged, do not be disheartened in prayer, even if for a long while dryness and distractions overcome you. Never mind: St. Theresa said that one quarter of an hour's heavenly consolation was not paid for too dearly by whole years of desolation and suffering. Ah! yes indeed, when God calls a soul, takes it as it were in His arms, bears it upon His heart; when He once pours out upon that soul His soothing and comforting balm, oh! then indeed does the remembrance of past faults and sorrows, of present trials fade into nothingness: God gives Himself to that soul, He becomes its life, its all! Of course heaven is not yet reached, such consolations are not of long duration, they are not given here below in a lasting sense;

but what we must feel from the very bottom of our hearts, is this desire, this need of grace, which our soul seeks every day of our lives. Thus, in all your prayers, when you come to the foot of the altar, when you communicate, when you read, when you are alone, when you are joyful, or when you are in grief, when you have troublesome duties to accomplish, in whatever circumstance you may find yourself, carry everything to God, and ask of Him this leaning and this fervour which will attach you for evermore indissolubly to Him. Here then, my children, is what I was thinking of this morning, when leaving my retreat, and what I wished to say to you. The season of Lent draws near, when we must be specially recollected. The Lenten retreat is before us, and in order to profit by it, and to bring others within its purifying influence, let us try to love the things of God, to attach ourselves to them, and not to suffer our lives to grow into a frivolous aimless wandering.

This week you have a solemn and precious occasion whereon to refresh your devotion, namely, the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Great graces are attached to it, and you know that the Church will open all her treasures upon that day. Approach, then, close to the Immaculate Heart of Mary your Mother, ask for yourself, and for all who are dear to you, love and taste for the things of God; and

doubtless your Mother, who has chosen you for her children, will obtain for you an abundance of that Divine sweetness, which I am so anxious for you to possess.

SIXTH CONFERENCE.

ON REPENTANCE.

THIS being the first of our Lenten conferences, I think it will be well, my children, to say a few words about the spirit of repentance. You know that one of Our Lord Jesus Christ's first speeches at the commencement of His Ministry on earth was "repent." When the Apostle St. Peter preached for the first time, he also exhorted those whom he brought to the faith of Jesus Christ to do penance. We know that repentance is the Spirit of the Gospel, the Spirit of the Church, and if we truthfully interrogate our hearts, we shall see how solid are the reasons it should be so.

Let us explain two things first of all, that we may understand each other thoroughly. There is interior repentance and exterior repentance. Interior repentance means the same thing as contrition. It is the grief, the sorrow for our sins, with the firm determination not to commit them for the future. This internal repentance, you are well aware, is absolutely necessary in order to

obtain remission of sins. It is a precious disposition which we must ask of God, which we must nourish in ourselves, and which produces the grandest results; for it is this sorrow for our sins which induces us to make generous resolutions never again to commit them, with the help of that Divine Grace, which is never wanting if we seek it.

Exterior penance is the fruits of the above; it is the result of interior repentance. And truly, if we are contrite, repentant, and humbled before God at the remembrance of our offences, so sadly often repeated, it is but just and necessary to offer some kind of satisfaction to Him. This outward repentance then, consists in the pains, privations, and sufferings which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves, or which we accept from the Hand of God. It is bound up of necessity, in the suffering, privation, or pain whatsoever, the measure of which is meted to us by God, or fixed by our own sense of what is right and prudent. Very well then! my children, now at the beginning of Lent, and during all the time of the Holy Forty Days, you must strive to practise these two kinds of repentance. The one evidently leads to the other, and if we wish to gather abundant fruit from these days so fraught with blessings, we must devote ourselves to the spirit of penance. As regards interior repentance, it is not only at the moment of preparation for confession, as you can well imagine, that we must excite ourselves to sorrow for sin. Compunction, the true spirit of com-

punction, is a gift of God, a precious virtue. The saints loved it, and the history of their lives ought to be an unceasing source of shame and humiliation to us when we see them giving vent to such keen regret, to such scorn and contempt of themselves before God, to such floods of burning tears, and for what? For faults which we, I doubt not, should consider very trifling, and which according to our views, would naturally have left but little trace upon their minds.

We must pray for this grace, my children, we must implore the Holy Ghost to give us this feeling and this virtue of interior contrition. We must remember how often during our lives we have offended God, counted as nothing, or as but of slight importance, His will, His law, and our duties; how we have given way to a thousand bad habits and caprices; how little we have watched, how little we have endeavoured to overcome ourselves. Yes, you will think of all this, I feel sure, to-day especially, when making your monthly examination of conscience; and when questioning your hearts, you will endeavour to obtain a true contrition which will derive its source and origin from your love of God.

But a few words upon exterior repentance also I think will be of use to you.

Doubtless you all have deeply at heart, the wish to obey the precepts of the Gospel, as far as your health

(which in these days is generally much weaker than of old) will permit of your following their dictates, softened as they are by present discipline. But, independently of this subjection to the laws about fasting and abstinence, there are, as you know, many practices of exterior penance accessible to everyone, and which are a powerful means of sanctification. In the first place, recollect this: penance consists in the voluntary privations we impose upon ourselves, or in the acceptance of the troubles we receive from the Hand of God; for often He provides them; and as St. Theresa says, we are so feeble, so cowardly, that God sends us illness, afflictions, difficulties, and crosses, to replace the penances which we should not have the courage to inflict upon ourselves. Therefore the voluntary acceptance which we make of these trials, is also the practice of exterior penance. The true spirit of penance, that of which the Gospel speaks, is, my children, to make every effort that lies in our power to combat the disorder that ever lives within us. There exists in our hearts a remnant of original sin, which never dies; a perpetual agitation and rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, of the senses, natural appetites, and unhealthy inclinations ever warring against the operations of grace and the law of God. You know St. Paul's words, "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind." He sighed, he prayed to obtain the end of this battle, and he was refused!

Well, then! by exterior penance, by vigilance, by care in watching ourselves, and in knowing ourselves, in fighting with and conquering ourselves, we must endeavour to re-establish order and equilibrium in our hearts; our mind must rule over our senses; sound reason must be our guide; we must seek to find, and listen to the inspirations of grace. During the hours of the day, in the course of our thoughts, of our words, of our actions, tell me, how often do we not lose the dominion and guidance of ourselves! what irregular movements! what foolish sallies! what rebellion! what obstacles to grace! Alas! where is the peaceful, well-ordered mind, which lives in a perpetual filial obedience to grace and to the Divine Will? Instead, the least thing disconcerts and wounds us! We obey the impetuosities of our character; the smallest obstacle, and our complaints are loud and bitter; the excess of our ill-humour, even perhaps, causes us to lose control over our thoughts, and to forget our own self-respect and dignity. Tell me, is it not better to learn to mortify oneself, to learn patience, and to be filled with the spirit of penance? Yes, indeed, our poor weak nature seeks what is pleasing, what is flattering to ourselves. As soon as a wish rises within us, it must be satisfied. Oh! Christian souls, you are not then aware that here lies a precious opportunity for gaining manifold blessings? What! you are Christians, and yet you do not know that in refusing yourselves the satisfaction of one

single caprice (for I cannot imagine with what ideas your heads are filled, that you think yourselves at liberty to indulge all your whims and fancies), you do not know that by imposing one privation upon yourselves, by moderating one of your desires, you offer to God a sweet smelling sacrifice? For instance, in the matter of your expenses: do you never allow yourselves to run into foolish extravagances with the means which God has given you; to be lavish beyond the requirements of your position? You never think, then, that by so doing you are grieving the Holy Ghost, and afflicting the Heart of Jesus? On the other hand, if you were to say to yourselves: "No! I can dispense with this or that purchase, it is not a necessary one:" here is a trifling self-denial to yourself, and yet an act of priceless value in the eyes of God! But beware of exaggeration in anything, my children; whilst complying with the reasonable exigencies of your surroundings, in order to please those with whom you live, there are a thousand occasions, presenting themselves daily, which you can embrace, of imposing small privations upon yourselves, of ruling over your senses, of checking the wayward movements of your characters, and of saying to yourselves: "I must live by the Spirit of Faith, I must resemble my dear Master Who suffered so much for me!" When you are eager in the pursuit of pleasure, when you follow your own inclinations, or humour some pet fancy, take care what you are about! Pause a moment; ask

yourself if it will be pleasing to God, or if you had not better give it up. Beginning thus every day, you will find peace, little by little, for you are well aware, my children, that nowhere is peace to be thoroughly enjoyed but in voluntarily imposed privations and self-denial.

Ah! what is truly painful and bitter to endure is, when sometimes spiritual exercises, prayer, and even the Holy Eucharist Itself, fail to bring joy and consolation! But, I ask you: if you have not the spirit of penance, if you give way to the indulgence of every caprice or fancy, is it surprising that you find neither joy nor consolation in holy things? You are seeking elsewhere for your happiness . . . . and nevertheless, you will not find it where you are seeking. Therefore, my children, the first precious result of exterior repentance is to gain for you an empire over yourselves, is to re-establish order and peace by submitting to God every faculty of your nature; and here is the great work of your life.

There is, besides, another advantage and another end in exterior repentance, and that is to make satisfaction to God, to pay Him the debt you owe. Be careful to do this; by the sacrament of penance, received with suitable dispositions and a true contrition, the sin is forgiven by the absolution of the priest, and if you have had the misfortune to offend God mortally, eternal punishment is remitted. But we must learn to give the temporal pain which God in His justice and goodness inflicts upon us

together with the satisfaction we make at the time, to Jesus Christ in union with His sufferings. The slight penance enjoined by the priest makes part of the sacrament, but you know what is taught, and is of doctrine; that in this penance the whole of the temporal satisfaction, the whole debt of sin is not included, and this is why you are exhorted to practise satisfaction for your sins in fasting (as far as your strength will permit), giving of alms, acts of charity, and also in your combats with your own inclinations, in your self-imposed privations, and in patient resignation under the trials which God sends you.

You must think of this, my children; for if we have not made satisfaction in this life, we shall have to acquit our debt elsewhere. Purgatory is a place where satisfaction is paid in severe measure, in proportions measured by Divine justice; proportions which are restrained even there by God's goodness and mercy; in spite of which there is suffering, intense suffering to be endured, during long years, during centuries, separated from God.

Here is a holy and just soul, cherished by God, filled with His grace; and we ask why does it suffer? Because its earthly debt is not yet paid, because that soul did not practise interior and exterior penance in the degree required.

Of a surety, my children, I do not wish you to serve God from motives of fear; no, you have a better feeling

than that in your hearts. Nevertheless it is good thus to remind ourselves of this just debt we have to acquit towards God. Therefore do not murmur another time when you have something to suffer. Perhaps it may be illness with which either you yourself or some one dear to you is afflicted. Oh! then without doubt you are permitted to feel the pain; God sends it in order that you should feel it; but why not be resigned to it? After much suffering patiently endured, after resignation, comes the day of consolation and of joy, when we see and breathe the light and fragrance of heaven. Often then must you ask yourselves this question, and to-day especially, when you come to Communion together, when you are reposing in the Heart of Jesus, when you are examining yourselves upon the month that is gone: "Am I practising mortification, interior and exterior penance? Have I paid my debt? Have I listened to my conscience? Am I sure of having done all this?" Neither must you neglect those plenary indulgences which you can gain so easily and so often, and which God in His wisdom knows how to apply as He sees fit. When you communicate here, *Enfants de Marie*, you gain a plenary indulgence. But do not imagine that you are thereby dispensed from suffering, or you will be making a strange mistake; the disposition with which you are to gain the indulgence is precisely that of repentance interior and exterior. Apply these indulgences which you

can obtain so readily, these votes of reparation, to the souls in purgatory, who invoke your intercessions, adding your own satisfactions and prayers; and thus by exterior repentance you will secure an all-powerful means of obtaining the graces of God.

Prayer is powerful indeed. Prayer! ah, my children, is the happiness of life. We may pray without ceasing, importune our Lord, converse with Him, as with a kind friend; and I hope you have all made a habit of this sweet communing. But, in order that your prayer may be efficacious, that you may be assured of God's promise to hearken to prayer, you must use the best means—you must suffer, my children, you must mortify yourselves in praying. Yes, a few acts of patience, a few victories won, a few sacrifices imposed upon oneself with courage and generosity, upon these things prayer ascends as in triumph to the throne of God. And when we read of the saints being exposed to the scorn and injustice of men, when we find them inflicting incredible tortures upon themselves out of love, rest assured that by so doing, they are reaping a great secret advantage. Oh, yes, there is an infallible way of drawing down the graces of Heaven upon ourselves, and you know how powerful the saints were in obtaining these graces and in showering them upon all around. Instead of this, is not your life one of luxury and frivolity, flying from the smallest symptom of pain and trouble? You pray, but

are not your prayers generally for the realization of your desires, for the satisfaction of your caprices? Alas! my children, in this case we pray with fervour and confidence; but how can you expect such a prayer to be granted?

I implore you, profit by these few words; think of them to-morrow in your meditation; reflect upon them in the communion which you are about to make. Ask for light, the grace of God. What ought you to do? what can you do during this Lent? See what there is you can retrench in your ordinary life, without disturbing or annoying those around you. Believe me there are many things you can do, in secret, which no one need see nor know of. Here is one of God's secrets. How many merits you may acquire! God will know how to recompense you in time and in eternity.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE.

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION. JOY AND SACRIFICE.

O-DAY, on the Feast of the Annunciation, all joys are united in the Heart of Mary, together with an effusion of the graces of the Holy Ghost. The angel salutes her respectfully, and asks for her consent to the great work of the Redemption. Mary is amazed and troubled, but, re-assured by the heavenly ambassador, she pronounces this word so closely resembling that which created the world "*Fiat.*"

The Divine Word then enters her bosom, clothes Himself with a Body in the likeness of our bodies, and receives from the immaculate Heart of Mary the purest and best of her blood; from which moment, as she says herself a few days after, in the canticle of her glorious humility, from henceforth all generations shall call the Mother blessed! And you also, my children, you her chosen daughters, you salute her with this sweet title of Mother, you love to repeat the praises which she has deserved. Mary receives, to-day, a participation in the

joys of heaven; happy in her God whom she possesses, united to the Divine Word by the closest of ties, confident of the sacred hour which is to regenerate the world, she offers to heaven and earth the spectacle of fulfilled prophecies, and of the desires of nations realized. What more could be wanting? Soon will dawn the great days of Bethlehem—and nevertheless, my children, even thus early, we find suffering and sacrifice associated with these joys and these glories. The poverty of Bethlehem opens the path, and soon will the sword of the Presentation pierce the soul of Mary, a weapon of sacrifice which she will henceforth and for evermore carry in her heart.

What does this mean, my children? do we not, all of us, met together in the Temple of the Passion, assist at the joyful Feast of the Annunciation, and at that of the Dolours, or the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin? If it is so, if God has been pleased, whilst crowning His privileged creature with ineffable riches, to unite in her sorrow to joy; to place, for her sake, sacrifice side by side with benediction; we must not complain, my children, if in our path through life we find trials hand in hand with consolations, but rather we must try to profit by the lessons and example of the admirable Mary. If we thoroughly comprehend the meaning of this Feast of the glorious Incarnation of the Word in the bosom of His Mother, we shall understand that, in this world, God

has provided intimate and blessed relationships for His creatures which are intended to bring them pure and true consolations. But at the same time, we must remember, that all these unions, all these ties, are given us by God, only that by them we may attain to sacrifice and to the Cross. All ends there, all leads thither, graces and blessings even are brought by troubles; do not we ever find pain and grief accompanying those things which are highest and best? Does not every day bring us trials? Do you not meet with contradictions and vexation at every step? Has God never wrung your poor heart by suffering? And, nevertheless, you must acknowledge that He has blessed you; He has given you the support of affection, of a happy and peaceful home; and often, very very often, you yourselves have been the makers of your own unhappinesses. Alas! are we not all subject to heart-rending faults? Are we not frequently exacting and unjust? Or, is there not perhaps, in our immediate vicinity, some spirit, some heart with which we cannot agree, to which we cannot adapt ourselves?

Life then is traversed by incessant annoyance, by perpetual sources of mortification. Oh, here is a lesson sent from Our Lord! Here below there is no such thing as perfect happiness, no joy which does not lead to sorrow. We sometimes see a life which God appears to have embellished with gifts, crowned with

blessings ; a day comes, an hour strikes, and all is shattered, all has vanished ! . . . . We shall find the Cross, my children, go where we may, do what we will ; we must always look forward to separation, to the term of our earthly affections ; we must be prepared for it. When I see so many persons clad in habits of mourning, so many lacerated hearts, so many bitter tears shed ; whilst pitying these miseries and infirmities, which pursue us from every side, I am obliged to repeat to myself that God consoles elsewhere, recompenses elsewhere ! Nevertheless, to speak justly, I do not deny that God sometimes bestows consolations in this world ; but it is precisely by this perpetual mixture of suffering, of bitterness, and of joy, that He wishes to teach us to find a safe refuge in His Heart. Tell me, when Mary dwelt with her Son in the holy House of Nazareth, was there not already the thought of sacrifice, throughout all those long years of peace and of tender companionship, amidst the exchange of pure and mutual love between the Son and the Mother? Believe me, the Cross was ever present, the sword never out of sight. But—resting upon the will of God, destined for the Reparation upon Calvary, Jesus and Mary consoled each other, in suffering together and in praying together.

Thus ought it to be with us. Oh, yes, my children, let us fly to the Source of all graces, there shall we find true joy; but then let us repeat, and repeat again to ourselves,

that the day will come when we must tear ourselves away from all we have loved upon earth, that time runs swiftly, that here below there is no permanent resting-place, that we must not look forward from day to day, but say at every hour that passes : " My God, I will make Thy Heart my home, I will seek my refuge in prayer; I will find my happiness in resignation to Thy Divine Will, for it is out of mercy that these afflictions are sent me. My Lord, I will obey Thee, I will love Thee always, I will endeavour to place myself ever at Thy feet, and in contemplation of Thy Divine Crucified Son, I will remember that in pain and sacrifice is to be found a sure pledge of happiness and of glory." You, feeble and fainting hearts, who fall under the weight of your trials, how then? will you not give God this pledge of your love, of your courage, and of your faith? What! you cannot wait for His consolations? Whither then, are you bound? These few days will soon pass, years roll on swiftly before you, all is fleeting, and heaven your country awaits you.

Ah, my children, how comforting it is to feed ourselves with the promises of our Faith! How lightened become our cares! As the Saviour said to the Samaritan woman, " If thou didst know the gift of God," so if we only knew this fountain of pure water which reaches unto heaven itself, we should become more generous, and more faithful. We, on the contrary, are discouraged, we lose heart, we allow ourselves to be beaten, we rush to seek amongst

human creatures what is never there to be found. We neglect prayer, we forsake Holy Communion, the well-spring of life. Difficulties multiply, sin returns, and the soul is ladened with a crushing burden.

Therefore, my children, be no longer surprised when suffering falls to your lot, for you have pressing need of it. We must expiate, we must make reparation, we must remember that our whole life is but a prolonged act of reparation: we must bear in mind that the Cross awaits us, and that Mary was only given the joys and blessings of maternity, on condition of her being vowed to a life of sorrow upon earth. But her Immaculate Heart was nourished upon Faith, she awaited the Cross with resignation; she knew, this Mother of Dolours, that in the Precious Blood which was shed, lay Eternal Life and Salvation for all mankind; she beheld the souls purchased by the sacrifice of her Son; and in her tenderness for us, in her love to God, she offered Him to death. Let us, then, be of good courage, and on this precious day, this holy occasion, let us learn to cherish the idea of sacrifice. Jesus Crucified is the Comforter of all sorrows; Jesus Crucified is the example of all virtues. Think of the Annunciation of Nazareth, of the Nativity of Bethlehem, of those years passed amidst such tender sweet relationships: Mary is ever faithful; she adores and loves the Will of God;—look at her on Calvary, at the very moment of the consummation of

the sacrifice, she is ever the same. How she loves the Cross ! how she cherishes it ! clinging to it as the inviolable pledge of salvation.

Hope then all things from the Lord; refuse Him nothing. Here is the moment for the sacrifice of these too earthly attachments, of these hasty impressions which you follow so eagerly, of these aversions and antipathies, of these idle conversations. Ah, take care ! You do but sow in pleasure to reap in tears ; whereas if you did but know how to watch over yourselves, how to detach and to purify yourselves, you would sow in sacrifice and reap in joy.

How I love to see you all united together under the auspices of Mary, between these two ideas of joy and sacrifice ! A few moments later, as I distribute the Bread of Life, I will beg of the Lord for you a real participation in the Cross, and you will, I trust, carry away more courage, more patience, more hope. Show yourselves to be children of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, and when you shall have learnt to bear a part in her sacrifice and in her tears, you will receive a share in her crown and in her everlasting reward.

NINTH CONFERENCE.

ON GRACE.

MY CHILDREN,—We are now beginning our retreat, and it is but natural that I should address the same question to you that I addressed to myself a short while ago. Wherefore this retreat after so many others which must have been profitable to your souls, after your Easter duties even have been accomplished? To this, I have nothing to reply, save that you will gain some new benefit by the exercises of this time. It is not necessary to any of you; strictly speaking, you are none of you in absolute want of it. But God in His goodness and mercy, has so arranged, that now, just before the month consecrated to Mary, we should meet together. These days and the foot of this altar will bring back many a precious recollection to your minds, many a remembrance, so dear to your hearts that it can never be obliterated! Besides, is it not true that we have ever new benefits to acquire from amongst the things of grace? Have we not always grace

itself to pray for and to obtain? Wherefore then, this retreat, my children? It is for the obtaining of the grace of God, which I shall make the subject of our preparatory instruction to-day; for I would wish to be always reminding you, that the first of our requirements, the foremost of our interests, not only during retreat, but throughout the whole course of our spiritual exercises, is to ask God to give us His grace; His grace—the treasure above all treasures, the greatest of all good gifts. If we have grace, we have all; if we have the misfortune to lose grace, alas! should we be possessed of all other good things, we have nothing.

To ask for grace and to obtain it, is then the object of this retreat. One of our greatest failings in the service of Our Lord, is that we rely too much upon ourselves, sometimes by presuming upon our own strength, and more often by allowing ourselves to be discouraged with the consciousness of our weakness and infirmities, in consequence of not trusting sufficiently in the help of God, and of not invoking this all-powerful aid with sufficient fervour and persistance. And nevertheless our faith teaches us that God never refuses us His grace for the necessities of our salvation, for the avoidance of moral evils. We believe that of ourselves we can never work our own salvation, that we have no claim, no right to grace and the divine rewards. Yes, indeed, grace we must have, and God never refuses it to us, only He wills that we ask for it.

You remember these words of the Council of Trent, that infallible mouth-piece of the Church: "Ask for that which you cannot acquire of yourselves." Our Saviour Jesus Christ said to His disciples after supper, "Without me you can do nothing." St. Paul, to complete this thought of Our Lord's, was careful to say, that all things were possible to him whom the Lord strengthened.

Grace! here is the great want of our souls! We do not ask for it enough, we do not rely upon it sufficiently; we do not prepare ourselves properly to receive and to obtain it. What we have to do, what we have to learn in these days of retreat, my children, is to find the art of asking for and of obtaining it.

You all know that the great need of the soul, is the grace of God; that it is, of all others, the thing most precious to obtain, and that you are here precisely to ask for it. I need not dwell on this point. If you have understood thoroughly Our Lord's infallible promises with regard to prayer, you will know how to say from the depths of your heart: "I have only to ask for the grace which I require, and I shall receive it;" for the Lord has said, "Ask, and you shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened to you." And this promise applies principally to the sanctification of our souls. To beg for grace—here then is our aim. But what grace? What grace have you come here to seek? What gifts of the Lord are we going to implore Him to give you for

your souls, and for the sanctification of your lives? I am not going to tell you what is the special grace of which you each stand in need, for I cannot do so. I do not even recommend you to seek for it just yet; do not seek any special object; but come here, as the child to its mother, with an open heart, a simple straightforward intention, free from all preoccupation, free from all fear, and from all desires.

Come and offer yourselves to God. He knows well, which are the particular wants of your soul. At a certain hour, at a certain moment during the course of your spiritual exercises, you will know how to recognize which is the grace you most urgently need, and assuredly it will not be the same for every one of you. Nevertheless there are already certain features of the grace of God which we may dwell upon, and which will assist us in our search and in our prayers. What do we require first of all? What we all want, my children, is light, that knowledge which instructs and which reveals. We all want a more vivid light, a deeper and clearer knowledge of our requirements and also of the will of God with regard to ourselves. What then is grace? Grace is, first of all, light. Jesus Christ has said: "I am the light;" and St. John has majestically repeated in his gospel, that the Word was the Light which should shine upon the world. Jesus Christ therefore is light, and the first of His graces is the gift of Faith.

We are walking in ways of obscurity, where we cannot see God, nor the things of God.

Faith, in spite of the veils with which it is covered, is a lamp—a torch which shines to enlighten our footsteps. This lamp, which assuredly exists in the souls of every one of us, must not merely be lit, but its brilliancy must be ever increasing. There must be progress in its radiance, as much progress as there are days in the year. Faith is as susceptible of development, as are all the other virtues, and will never cease to grow and expand until the hour which brings us face to face with God.

Faith, this faith by which we live and move; by which, according to St. Paul, we *feel* God; by which invisible spiritual things become as present substances; this faith by which we assist at the mysteries of Jesus Christ, partake in the acts of His life, hear His words; how are we to cultivate it, so that it may teach us our wants, show us our faults, and indicate to us a remedy for our evils? How are we to promote its growth within our hearts? By dint of work and study we can acquire great knowledge, great insight into the developments of science; but as to faith, will human effort suffice to make it grow within us? Without doubt, we must study it, and never neglect any means of fathoming its depths, but, as you are aware, faith is a gift of God, a heavenly light, and is obtained by prayer, because it is

God who is the giver. Do you not remember having read of many a saintly life, ignorant according to the world's views, but elevated by the gifts of faith and by the grace of the Lord, to the heights of a sublime understanding?

And we ourselves, if, by a fervent prayer, by a well-made communion, by a good meditation, we have gained one higher degree in the participation of faith, oh! how then has the light within us increased! how has conviction penetrated our souls! what strength has been given us! Here then, my children, is what I had to say to you as a commencement; that at every hour of this retreat, you must pray to God for His light respecting all the truths upon which you are about to meditate. The words which you hear are an instrument, but are not the means by which you will obtain light and grace; God alone is the giver of them. He alone can make you holy, He alone can give you this radiant light, these heavenly consolations by which we taste of the gifts of the Lord.

What grace have we still to ask for? My children, you know that grace does more than merely enlighten us. The light which comes from God is not a mere theory, a mere speculation; the light of faith, doubtless, renders us certain of these mysteries which God has revealed to us; we believe them upon His word, we would die sooner than deny them; but together with these mysteries and dogmas, there are precepts, revealed laws and

conditions to be fulfilled, before we can merit heaven and accomplish the work of our sanctification and salvation. When we have recognized the truth of these dogmas, all is not done: what remains? We must obtain the grace of *will:* this is what the doctrine of the Church has always taught; grace enlightens, elevates and illumines our intelligence, and at the same time strengthens our will. Let us ask for the grace then which renders the will steadfast, honest and pure.

I can tell you, that in the study of the requirements of souls, one of the most saddening of sights is to see, that in a pious and Christian life, with the most sincere intentions, with a great devotion to noble works of charity, a soul may remain miserably weak. This poor soul feels that it is so, and suffers. There is in it a constant and sorrowful irritation against something indefinable, which hinders it, a kind of indescribable astonishment at never finding strength within itself. There is nothing extraordinary in this; it has no strength. Weakness and infirmities are natural to us; we are made up of incompetency and frailty. The grace which fortifies the will is therefore needful to us; God will give it us; He never refuses it! But ask for it! Seek it!

There is nothing but weakness within us. St. Paul knew this; he went farther still, he rejoiced therein, inasmuch as he then felt more forcibly his want of God's

assistance. How well he knew how to pray! With what eloquence he describes his warfare with himself, in his Epistles! He sighed, he wept, and you know what answer was given him: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Here is the virtue heaven exacts, and to which God lends His power. Hence those blessed words, so cheering, so comforting, "When I am weak; then am I strong," because when weak we pray well, and God never refuses His aid to a humble, confiding prayer. Well then! my children, you will learn to ask better, that you may obtain more. After the holy time of Easter, after this retreat, we shall be to all outward appearance the same; our nature will have undergone no metamorphosis, it will contain the same miseries, the same weaknesses, the same sufferings, the same wants of all kinds. In what then, will consist the fruits of this retreat? what will be its result? what progress will have been made? The advancement made will consist in more humble, more fervent, more frequent petitions for grace.

We are well aware that grace is a necessity in this life; but we do not pray for it, we do not seek it; we do not understand that it alone can raise us out of ourselves, regenerate what is imperfect, sanctify us, deliver our souls from all that is imperfect and embarrassing, and cleanse us from all the stains of sin. But, once we have truly asked for and obtained this grace; with this constant prayer on our lips, with this divine succour aiding

us, we shall enter into the liberty of the children of the Lord. Happy day! blessed moment! when we enter into the liberty of the children of the Lord! Those chosen ones are not exempt from faults, from sins, or from trials, but they pray, they entreat, they trust, they hope, they advance. This is the liberty of God's children, this is what we have to seek in retreat.

Do you ask me, how we have to solicit, in order to obtain? Assuredly if I were to tell you, that you had only to ask for all the graces which you desire, in order to obtain them, you would be careful to gather up my words, and would hasten to communicate them to others without: but here, without saying anything extraordinary, without teaching you anything novel, I can assure you conscientiously, that you will obtain those graces necessary to your sanctification and salvation, if you ask for them well, for God cannot refuse them to you.

How then, my children, are we to ask in order that we may receive? Wherefore does the Church teach us that nothing is impossible to prayer when we ask in faith? that it would be a cruel snare if we did not obtain that for which we ask with sincerity, with good will, and (be mindful of this) *with the desire of success?* Why, because it might happen (as indeed is not rarely the case) that there are graces we should be sorry to receive; as for instance those which enlighten us, which show us how to cure our faults, and our vacillations; those which would remedy our

principal wants, and establish us firmly in the way of the Lord. Such graces, we ask for with trembling, hesitation, and timidity, because they cost us dear, because virtue always demands sacrifice. Well, my children, here is the moment to ask, courageously, for these salutary graces. If in the light, which these days of retreat, under the inspiration and influence of the Divine Presence, bring us, we feel, we perceive truly in what we are wanting; if we recognize in what direction our will requires strengthening and rectifying, ah! then let us pray to the Lord that He will grant us this grace, the best, the most precious of all!

Again, how must we ask in order to obtain? I will tell you: by doing what you are now doing, what you will do during these holy days; by withdrawing yourselves into the depths of your own hearts whilst in this sanctuary, and not only here, but also as much as possible in course of the day, in your homes, amongst your families. You will endeavour, without offending others, without failing in any legitimate duties, to retire for a short time into the privacy of your own hearts and listen to the voice of the Lord, which will say to you: "Come with me, be calm, be silent and pray." Without doubt the more we try to retire within ourselves in order to seek God, the better we ask for grace and the better we obtain it. That is clear of itself. The mind then becomes less distracted, less divided, less engrossed; our

frivolous nature has a constant need of being steadied and strengthened. In one quarter of an hour's meditation, how many obstacles, difficulties and distractions are there to overcome! At any rate, whilst in retreat, let us try to be more recollected that we may pray and meditate better than we have yet done. I know that this does not depend entirely upon yourselves; I know that there are various laws of society to which you have to submit: but I ask of you at least, a true desire that you may profit in silence and prayer by the thoughts which our Divine Saviour is suggesting to you.

In conclusion, how shall we ask and obtain? Here is the way. Here is the disposition of spirit which pleases God beyond all others, here is the best of prayers: to give yourselves to God: to give Him your thoughts, your desires, your entire will. After all, is it not just that you should do this? is there such a great merit in it? It is He who gave them to you, shall you not render them back to Him? He desires, in your retreat, to create you anew, to regenerate and transform you. What is to hinder you from being thus reformed? What indeed but the obstacles presented by your own will, in the freedom which you so frequently abuse! Well then, resolve to have no more stumbling-blocks, no more barriers. You must wish what God wishes, and remit unreservedly into His hands this liberty which He has bestowed on you. Yes, such an act is precious indeed; yes, it will draw down from heaven an abun-

dance of Divine blessings. Yes, I tell you, I promise you this; and now, when in a few moments God gives you His Benediction, when the Heart of Jesus opens for your sakes, open your hearts also; give Him yourselves! it is so easy, so good and so sweet to make an offering of our whole being to God! If then you still ask of me what dispositions God exacts from you, in order that He may enrich you with all these gifts during the retreat, I will repeat to you again and again—The disposition He requires, is this oblation of yourself, this offering of your hearts, this complete surrender of your troubles, of your affections, of your fears, of your hopes, into His hands. Yes, leave all in the hands of God, and let Him do as He wills. Has God then no care for you? Does He not cherish you? Has He not ever encompassed you with the tender care of His watchful Providence? Give Him all; He will not allow you to surpass Him in generosity; do you be liberal and generous towards Him, and you may be sure that He will be the same to you.

TENTH CONFERENCE.

ALL FOR GOD.

MY CHILDREN,—Reflection and prayer are the two means which God offers to us, in these days of retreat, for the asking and obtaining of those graces of which we stand in need.

Reflection and prayer! We must seek for those tranquil hours, those propitious moments which allow us to give our undivided hearts to God. We must pray for them earnestly, uniting ourselves with the Will of the Lord to retrench what is displeasing to Him, and to accept what He sends. Nothing is more just than to do this; and with a steadfast will, nothing is less impossible.

To aid you in this work, I would wish to remind you to-day, what is the sovereign rule of conscience, which we must follow in order to know and embrace good, and to recognise and avoid evil. What is it that renders an action either good or bad? This is what we are going to examine. The explanation is simple enough no doubt, but it is worthy of all our attention. We shall see in what this rule of conscience, this fundamental principle

of the Christian life consists, what obstacles are in opposition to it, and finally what is the true application to be made of it.

Firstly then, what is this rule of conscience which we must follow? What constitutes good or evil for us? Good is that which leads to God; evil that which alienates us from Him. God, in creating and placing us upon this earth, in enriching us with His gifts, in opening His Heart to us with an ineffable love, gave Himself to us as our end, our one supreme destination. We live, and it is for God we live; we act, and it is for God we act. From the cradle to the tomb we are journeying to God, and woe unto us, if, turning backwards in our road, we pretend to take other directions of our own. The path is all traced, God is our end and our destination, we must be ever turned towards Him, seeking to possess Him; there is our welfare, our only good; evil lies in the contrary direction.

What is it which constitutes order in nature? It is the accomplishment of all the laws which God has established. The plants, the crops, the harvests, the light, the air we breathe, all, in a word, all these are in order, because they are in conformity with the Divine regulations. If God, by the might of His Will, were to command that these laws should be for one moment infringed; if, in His justice, in order to punish mankind as He has already done several times before, He were to derange

the stability of these laws, all would fall into confusion. The prophet said to God, "All perseveres in order, because all is in submission to Thee;" we also ought to say: "My life is passed in order and justice, because the Lord dwells in my soul, and is entirely submitted to Him."

Thus, order is dependence on God. This is what we mean when we speak of *serving God.* My children, if you depend upon God, if you refer all your actions, your liberty and your whole existence to Him, you are in a state of order. But if all these works, these efforts, these anxieties, refer to yourselves; if you seek to preserve these good gifts which God has given you to distribute abroad, egotistically within yourselves; if you seek supreme happiness and perfect contentment elsewhere than in God, you are no longer in order. Order means, to turn to God, to depend solely upon Him, to seek Him always. Hence the words so often repeated in Scripture, "Seek the Lord, seek ye the kingdom of God."

You will understand now, my children, what it is that makes our actions either good or bad. From the hour of awakening until that of retiring to rest, what occupies our time? Alas! I do not pretend to say that to do well, we must always have the thought of God present in our minds; this constant effort is impossible; the saints in the whole course of their lives never succeeded in it; they could not, because the infirmity of our nature is such that we cannot maintain recollection of

the presence of God unceasingly. Thus I do not mean to say that every action which is not actually offered to God, is a sin, no; nevertheless, remark well, how in the life of the conscience, in the movements of our free and intelligent spirit, we cannot find one single action, which is not either bad or good. All those actions which we style *indifferent*, such as eating, sleeping, going and coming, talking, &c., all these actions which form so great a part of our day, how are they to be good? Not because each one of them is separately, and at every moment offered to God; to do this would be desirable, but is not possible.

They will be good, my children, if we have dedicated them to God by a general intention, an intention which will remain fixed in the soul, and will guide it as long as it is not retracted. For, as a clock when once wound up, follows its course without our having to rewind it at every succeeding hour, so our intention, once given to God, as long as it is not retracted by a contrary will, influences every one of our actions. Nevertheless, you know that we are bidden to renew this intention frequently; and this is why, in our childhood, we were taught to offer our meals, our studies, and all our actions to God; and have we not all of us too quickly forgotten this habit?

Here then is the rule of good and of evil. That which renders an action good, and incapable of leaving trouble behind it in the conscience, is, when it is not in opposition

to God, when it can offer itself to God and be accepted of Him. No doubt our actions would have more merit, if interior love, the spirit of charity, immediately directed each one: nevertheless, an honest and Christian intention, with which we begin the day, will remain and sanctify them. But when there is one of our actions which cannot be offered to God, one of which He cannot approve, when we are unable to say, "My God, I offer Thee this action, I dedicate to Thee these thoughts, this pleasure; it is for Thy sake I am pursuing this undertaking, that I am cherishing this affection;" when we cannot say thus, our action is a bad one. We may not be committing a grave fault, for a mortal sin is not easily committed, especially in a life that is habitually Christian; still, when an action cannot be offered to God, when it is repugnant to Him, when it is in contradiction with one of His laws or attributes, it is evil, it is a sin, whatever be its degree of guilt.

Well then, my children, we must avoid such sins. Look over your lives, your days, your hours, now, this moment; supposing the Saviour were to question you Himself, could you answer Him, "My Lord, I live for Thee, I act for Thee, I offer Thee all that I do and all that I love?" Instead, what vanities! what weaknesses! what self-seeking! what infractions of the positive laws of our Saviour do we find! Everything that does not refer itself to God, is evil.

How shall we avoid the evil? By praying that we may be guided into the right way, and that our minds and hearts may be turned towards God.

Let us choose the good, then, by referring all to the Lord with a firm and pure intention, and if when examining ourselves, we discover thoughts and actions which cannot be offered to God, let us boldly eradicate them from our lives.

Here, I wish to indicate to you what you have to practise in order to refer all to God, for we must not be content with too general ideas. Life contains these three things:—joy (of which there is but a little), sorrow (which abounds), contradiction (of which there is much).

Joys, yes! your heart has experienced a few; they are the effect of God's protection. You find them in some fortunate occurrences, and in those consolations of religion which you know how to look for within your hearts. What then have you to do when in joy? To thank God, to acknowledge Him as the author of all good, to receive consolation from His hand and to offer it back to Him. Is this duty so very difficult to fulfil?

As for sorrows, you have them in every kind and shape; but you know that they can be augmented by ourselves—we render our cross more painful by anxiety, solicitudes, and vacillation. In your troubles, whatever they may be, God appears to strike, to humiliate, and to annihilate you. Oh, Christian souls, what would you

have? You must bow your heads and recognise that God is Master, but also that He is a Father who loves you, and who knows what is meet for you. Direct your thoughts then according to Faith, and not according to your poor human nature! When you know not what words to use, then you must cry to the Lord, and say, "It is Thou, Lord, who offerest me Thy Cross, and who sayest to me, 'If you will come after Me, deny yourself.'" You may sigh, you may lament, I give my consent, but at the same time you must submit and resign yourselves, murmuring these words: "Lord, Thy Will be done!" You must bow your heads, you must humble your hearts, and God will give you peace.

As to contradictions, there are many great ones in your minds, in your hearts, in your inclinations, and in your perpetual distractions. Our poor nature is fallen and degraded; every part of us is filled with disorder; alas! that it should be so! Well then, what shall we say to all this? Why, that "I know that in the designs of God, there are no difficulties so obstinate, but what His grace can surmount them; I know that God will not allow me to be tempted above my strength. I know that all things may be made to contribute to my salvation. God could be no longer Truth and Justice if it were otherwise. My God! I suffer, I cannot succeed, I know not what is amiss with me! My God, give me courage!" Then we advance, we do not allow ourselves to be beaten, we

give no heed to the enemy who strives to weaken and dishearten us, for God never discourages and never overwhelms.

Here, my children, is subject for your meditations. Think of this before God. And now is it necessary to remind you that it is by prayer you must try to impress these truths and sentiments upon your hearts? Do not brood over your troubles, do not dwell in the past, try and instil something new into your souls, try and live one day as you have never lived before, try to do something more than you have hitherto done, and recommence a new life in the grace of the Lord. You are situated in the world, resign yourselves! in the midst of afflictions, take courage! in joy, thank the Lord! Thus all will be well with your life, all will be in order, all will be in conformity with the first rule of the Christian's conscience, which is to do all for God, and never to suffer anything in life which is contrary to Him.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE.

THE DIRECTION OF THE WILL.

ONE thing is very certain, and you feel it in your innermost hearts, my children, which is that *good* means *order;* and order, in our lives, is a faithful conformity to the Will of God. If we can say that the reason which influences our every thought and our every action has its origin in God, all is well. But if in our lives, there should exist other things which, far from being referred to God, far from being in conformity with His holy Will, are opposed to Him, repugnant to Him, one word only can express them,—evil, which is disorder, which is sin. Well then! you wish for order, for that which is to draw you near to God, for that which will bring your whole existence into perfect harmony with His Will. The experience of your past years has taught you, that there alone is to be found peace and happiness, even upon earth.

Already this morning we have been conversing on this subject, and I indicated to you this simple but sovereign

rule of referring all to God. I insisted upon the full comprehension of this principle, not indeed that I pretended to teach it you, God forbid ! but because I wished to bring so necessary a recollection before the minds of us all, and to make it present and actual. I shall continue the subject this evening, and apply myself especially to what concerns our will in its reference to the Will of God. What then should be our will in this respect? It ought ever to be turned towards God. Our will is our strength, our principle of action, is what can and must attain unto the Lord. The mind thinks, understands, reflects, decides; but the will is the mainspring of its action. Therefore the important and essential point is to direct it towards God, and to say to oneself every day: "I must resolve to seek God that I may rest in Him and find my delight in His service." The will ought to have three characteristics or qualities upon which I entreat you to meditate. The will should be enlightened, should be generous, and finally should be devoted. There are two reasons for which it should be enlightened; firstly, to avoid falling into vexatious extremes; secondly, to make no resolution which is not in conformity with the judgments of God. The light of faith is necessary to avoid two extremes equally common to our weak human nature; and as extremes meet, as the saying goes, we sometimes find the two together in a soul that is otherwise sincerely Christian.

These two extremes, so hurtful to the firm direction of the will, are first of all, frivolity and impetuosity, secondly languor and self-indulgence.

The same persons may be and often are, both frivolous and lukewarm, both impulsive and yet slothful, I mean with regard to the things of God. Here then is a great obstacle to light. We are changeful, flying like the butterfly from flower to flower; our thoughts wander aimlessly and unhindered, we are no longer in possession of ourselves, no longer recollected. Can the mind thus dissipated compose itself of a morning, in order to count up, if I may use the expression, its spiritual expenditure and to build the edifice of its sanctification? Day arrives, we begin to think, to pray a little, and then what passes in our souls, in our minds?

I am speaking of persons who are taken up with the excitements and vanities of the world, who live in its distracting whirl and idle—often painful preoccupations. What do we find in such souls? Is the will in search of God? Is it in the path which leads to God? If so, it is quite by chance, and we cannot do the work of our salvation by an accident!

We must *desire* our salvation; the merit lies in the will which attaches itself to the law of God, and which has eternity for its aim and object. In a frivolous mind, there is nothing of the kind, no light, no deliberation, no reasonable actions! And nevertheless even to these

souls, there is a good side, for where is there a creature of God which has not some good in him !

Sometimes, recalled to themselves, questioning their hearts in simplicity and truth, they do themselves justice and see their vain shallow existence as it really is. I said just now, that there are minds difficult to arrest, but even they are preferable to these creatures who resemble stagnant waters, who live as though they were sleeping. Oh ! my God ! grant that these souls may pray, may reflect ! They have grace, and in these hours of retreat, in these quiet hours when prayer and recollection are easy, may they pray for light, and for a generous determination, may their hearts resound with the words, "I ought and I will go to God !"

Oh! lukewarm souls, do you not remember the severity of Our Lord's words on your behalf? as if God would somehow have preferred mortal sin, even crime, to this state of tepidity which leads to disgust and nausea ! Lukewarmness, enervation, negligence, cowardice in the things of God, here are the chains which bind some unfortunate soul ! Then prayer is forsaken ! Mass heard late on a Sunday and even then considered a trouble ! no more spiritual readings, no more struggles against difficulties ! Fight, and conquer oneself ! never ! it is too fatiguing! And yet, the hour of gaiety and pleasure strikes, and instantaneously this languid soul returns to life ! The excitement passed, she is weary, and

is wearisome to others, a bore to herself and a bore to those around her.

And where is the remedy for all this, my children? Near enough to you, if you wish to find it. In whatever state your souls, whose nature is to live for God, may be, you must *will*, and in order to will, you must pray. But you must pray in spite of yourselves and against yourselves; you must pray to God, not that He may accommodate Himself to us, to our weakness, to our fancies; but that we may go to Him, and whilst retaining all that is lawful and proper in a Christian life, may discard all the rest so as to find Him. We must consent to be reasonable, to give our souls this necessary direction; we must know where we are going, whither we are tending, where we wish to arrive. Years roll on, and afterwards what remains? Death comes, strikes all ages near you and around you. You are warned and yet you do not think! Here, then, my children, are the two extremes against which I wished to warn you, frivolity and lukewarmness. The only remedy is prayer, that earnest, assiduous prayer which implores the light of God, and an enlightened will so as to decide upon, judge and accept all things, as God Himself judges and accepts them. My children, the world and the Christian life have each a different manner of looking at things. That of the world is purely carnal, natural and earthly, and is anathematized in the Gospel by these words of Our Lord: "Woe unto the world!"

Therefore I must say a few words to you about worldly souls. For them, there is nothing beyond the present life upon the earth, health, plenty, satisfaction, and pleasures; their sole idea of happiness lies in the good things of this world, beyond that, nothing! They never pass this limit; whatever pleases them, whatever flatters them, whatever satisfies their tastes and caprices and embellishes their earthly existence, they consider *good:* thus they think, here the end towards which they are bent.

Now, my children, need I ask you if it is thus that God judges? The prophet has said: "The thoughts of God are not as men's thoughts." Does God judge as we do for the welfare of our souls, in His wisdom, in His prudence, in the workings of His Providence? Let us take, for example, illness and health. I do not mean to tell you that you should prefer illness to health; no, pray for health; I exhort you to do so, and I wish you may all possess it for the sake of the good which you will be enabled to do; but after all, illness may come bringing with it sufferings and infirmities; few lives are exempt from them. Well, then! when we suffer, what must we do, unless it be to say to ourselves: "It is God, Who out of His wisdom and the designs of His tender love, sends either sickness or health?" If we murmur, if our health is our sole preoccupation, if we give ourselves up to a habit of brooding over ourselves, and of perpetually taking

ridiculous precautions against evils which do not exist (for we are often in better health, when we take least care of ourselves), can you believe that then our will is enlightened or well-directed? No, no, my children, for then we do not think as God thinks. A reasonable and moderate care of our health is a duty which must be fulfilled; but incessant preoccupation and murmuring about it is a sin. Complain if you will, but at any rate, let it be with submission and a loving acceptance of the Divine Will in suffering, for there is to be found light for us all!

Let us now consider privation and abundance; there are privations in every situation of life. Want sometimes is the successor of plenty, whilst a position of mediocrity falls to the lot of many in this world. Then again, the world values naught save riches, abundance, and luxury. Is this God's view? Certainly not, and that will which attaches so high a price to wealth is far from being enlightened. Be what you are! the good things which you possess, God gave them to you, you receive them from His hand, they are not yours but His, acknowledge that you must return them back to Him. And if God were to take them from you, if you were to experience a reverse of fortunes, if you were to find yourself suddenly in an inferior position, ought you to be discouraged, ought you to let yourself be cast down? I do not pretend to bid you rejoice, but I tell you that then you should raise

your eyes to heaven, and lift your thoughts higher and higher, till they rest upon the Divine Providence.

The judgment of the world upon this point is contrary to that of God, as is ever the case. The least humiliation, the slightest deception grieves and ruffles you beyond measure. Now God sent you these little occasions of sanctification, and you break out into murmurings! Ah! take care, for when bitterness thus springs from your heart, it proves the existence of passions of the most earthly nature within you.

Are your thoughts as God would have them to be? Is your will in conformity with the Will of Jesus, He Who was meek and humble of heart, Who prayed for His murderers, Who commanded and practised the forgiveness of injuries, Who crowns patience in the midst of humiliation? Be of good courage then! be recollected! be silent! pray! ask for patience, and thank God for having given you a precious opportuuity of imitating His Divine Son.

Here, my children, are a few examples to illustrate my idea; here is what I mean by a will enlightened by the views of faith, and under the direction of motives derived from heavenly thoughts. You have faith, you know the Gospel, you know how to lead a Christian life. Live by that light, and do not imagine that I am suggesting to you something extraordinary, or an exaggerated view of perfection. No, I am speaking only of what is true wis-

dom, sound reason in conformity with the Will of God.

Let us make a sad confession, my children; we all have within us, together with the deplorable heritage of sin, which we have received from our forefathers, a certain opposition to *good*, in plain words, to God. Albeit there are some natures more or less favoured with the gifts of the Lord, nevertheless, in every child of Adam there is always this opposition, which distresses and wearies him, and which is ever fighting against God. We have no taste for heavenly things; prayer gives us no pleasure, it does not enter into our natural inclinations. Without doubt there are souls which find their consolation in prayer, and again there are others and very holy ones who find therein desolation and trial, and who, notwithstanding, possess within themselves a fund of courage which attaches them to this blessed and beloved cross. But generally, the taste, the inclination to prayer is wanting. Well, then, we must wish for it, and create it within us, and this is what reflection should acquire during retreat. We must turn towards God, tend to Him, and seek Him by Christian acts, by an entire submission to His Gospel.

We do not know how to love God; we wish to love Him as we love creatures. It is very easy to love that which flatters our senses, but it requires a brave will, an energetic determination of conquering all obstacles, before we can love God, Whom we neither see nor feel, Who

appears so distant, and yet Who is near. We feel that we have this opposition within us, that our life is not ordered as it should be, that its aim is not eternal salvation. There is something then, to be done; we must take courage again, and excite within ourselves an ardent generosity. Is not God worthy of it? Do you esteem God for what He really is? Have you not, perchance, more esteem and more consideration for the persons with whom you live than for God? Is this order, my children? Is this right? Are you bound for the true goal? No, indeed, you are not; you are wandering far out of the path, you are stumbling and hesitating as you go, often falling by the way, and thus finding out your error. Your will, then, must be strong and generous, especially when, after the examination of your life, after the illuminations of retreat, you shall have discovered where lie your real obstacles. Every character has its weak side; we all have our faults and failings, our impulses and inclinations; here lies the evil to which we must apply a remedy, here is what we have to reform.

What is the service of God? What is the spirit of the Gospel? Listen to the words of Jesus Christ, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." What does this mean? Why that we must not act according to our inclinations, habits, or instinctive desires. We must not seek the gratification of personal feeling, but by the victory over our own passions strive towards the end

which God has given us, namely, life everlasting. Here is true renunciation, here is wisdom and reason. We agree in theory, but the practice of it is hard and painful to us; we have need of courage then, and it is in prayer that you must learn to love even unto sacrifice. During these days of retirement, keep ever before your eyes the supreme end of life. This world is a mere passage: the accessory ought not to supersede the principal. We must arm ourselves with faith, and say in our hearts: "Oh! my God! I will strive, I will impose sacrifices upon myself; I shall suffer, but Thou wilt be my end, in Thee I shall find a Father's Heart. Ah! my Lord, I love and serve Thee very ill! How often have I forgotten and abandoned Thee! How often have I confided in my own strength and in creatures! But by praying unto Thee, in spite of myself, against myself, and with the aid of Mary, I shall seek and find my real happiness and repose in Thee and with Thee. This grace, which Thou hast promised me, I will seek it and ask for it all the days of my life. My Lord, Thou wilt grant me this grace which will cleanse me from my self-love, detach me from my own inclinations, and which will enable me to gain the final victory over myself! Lord, this work will be an arduous one! There will be many an hour in which I shall feel the cruel darts of the enemy keenly; then, oh! my God, I will take refuge under the shelter of Thy wings, I will invoke the Star of the Sea, and with

her I have a sure hope of arriving safely in port at last!"

This is what I mean by an enlightened will; everything results in prayer, my children, I must ever reiterate to you. Think less, and pray more; pray until you are in a direction which is pleasing to God.

Look at this young tree, it has taken a bad inclination, and in order that it may resist the wind and not fall a victim to the blast, the gardener with difficulty forces it into an opposite direction, until it shall have regained its upright position. Thus is it with a soul. You, my children, I feel convinced, will have no such efforts to make. Do not your hearts seek God? Have you not given Him pledges of fidelity and love? Are not your works praiseworthy? Are there not many souls around you, whom you have edified, sanctified, and brought into the ways of peace by your influence? My children, the good that you have done will bring its own reward; by your faithfulness you will obtain still greater graces, and God after recompensing you in this present time, will crown you in Eternity.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE.

ON EVIL.—ITS SOURCES AND EFFECTS.

MY CHILDREN,—We are following a well-known path. Every succeeding retreat brings us round of necessity to the same order of truths, recommended to us by the Holy Spirit for the sanctification of our souls. And yet you know full well, that even though these truths are the same, there is ever fresh grace and fresh help to be found in them.

To-day we will seek to discover attentively what is the bane of our souls, what is the true, the only unhappiness of a Christian soul. I shall tell you many a thing which you already know, but God, in His goodness, will add thereunto that which you all have yet to learn, that which will detach you from those things which estrange you from Him, that which will increase your sorrow for sin, and purify your life now and hereafter. We will ask by the Immaculate Mary for grace to conceive a sincere regret for all that displeases God, for the eradication of our faults, and finally, for a generous resolve to go straight to

the end whither Our Lord calls us. What is the reigning evil of our souls? Shall I retrace its history? I both must and can do so, for on this point the Sacred Scriptures and Divine words have left us all the necessary lessons.

According to the primitive designs of the Creator, evil, that is sin, which separates and estranges us from God, our only end and our supreme good, was never intended to have a place in our souls; there were in the beginning two orders of intellectual creatures, the angelic creature, and the human creature. Each had been created in the grace of God, in justice and holiness, and nevertheless, with the liberty of free-will. You know, my children, what happened.

Few words suffice to remind us of it, and at the foot of this altar, we shall, I trust, know and understand that the bane of the soul is, above all, pride which revolts, weakness which seduces, and disorder which brings all into confusion, and leads to final destruction.

First then, Pride, which revolts.—See yonder angel, dazzling as the light of day (his name of Lucifer had been given him, because he was the bearer of light), with his sublime intelligence incessantly contemplating the Divine perfections. Above that angel there is nothing but celestial beatitude. What could be wanting to his happiness, dignity, or grandeur? In a faithful submission to the author of his being, in depend-

ence upon Him, and a constant obedience to His laws during the time of probation, he ought to have found the pledge of all the good gifts predestined for him. But instead, what happened? What befel this brilliant intellect, so acute and unfettered, so delivered from all material influence and sensible impressions, what befel him?

You know the answer, Christian souls. What a history! God chose to reveal it to us for our own instruction. We know that the angels rebelled and that they fell, that from angels they became devils, and that instead of heaven they have hell for their eternal inheritance. What had passed? They had to obey; obedience and submission were required.

Doubtless you remember the opinion of the doctors, authorized by the Church, although not an article of faith; namely, that Lucifer and his angels revolted against the idea of an Incarnate God, of the Son of God made man; they were humiliated at having to adore this divine mystery, they refused to recognize it, exalting themselves in the pride of their angelic dignity, and thus they fell! And it is owing to pride, the pride of a thought which finds its origin in self, it is owing to disobedience, that insane pride which rebels and revolts, that sin entered into the world and ravaged heaven. This is wherefore God wrote by the hand of His apostle that He had found wickedness amongst His angels, and

that He had bound them with everlasting chains in a place of woe and despair. What a catastrophe, my children, for one thought of pride! Ah! if we do not understand these things, it is that we have not prayed enough for the grace of that faith which will teach us our dependence on God, the one only master and sovereign of all things. God demands the submission and dependence of His creatures both for our own happiness and peace, and also for the increase of His own glory, and the guarantee of His rights.

Ah, my children, I ask you how often, if we interrogate our memory, shall we not find in our hearts this overweening pride, which rebels and rejects the yoke, declining to submit! We must follow our own tastes, our own inclinations; we must worship and pamper ourselves, or receive adoration from others; as for humble dependence, submission, the submission of a soul which abandons itself to God through love, we will have none of it! We fear these virtues, we repel them!

Therefore I conjure you, if in the remembrance of your past life, you should discover this resistance to God, if it has ever happened to you to disobey Him, to rebel against His laws, ah! then humble yourselves and take care that every trace of this disobedience be eradicated. Look at those beings of an angelic nature, fallen, given over to rage and despair, because of one day's rebellion!

This state of insubordination is but too natural to cer-

tain souls. There are characters which know not how to give way and to yield, which take and interpret the Gospel after their own manner, and which refuse to accept that which is displeasing to them. There are characters, which in the face of all duties to family, society, or the Church, repeat incessantly: "I will not yield, I will not abase myself, I will not submit." Detestable characters are these, destined to work their own misery and that of those around them! With them, there is no peace, no patience, no sweetness, and never does a word of kindness pass their lips. If they are in authority, how hardly do they exercise it! how does the smallest infringement irritate them! what perpetual annoyances in their households! Is this, think you, what a Christian interior should be, presided over by the spirit of Jesus? Perpetual storms, discord, ill-humour, discontent! And how about the poor servants, those from whom you demand obedience as a right, how do you treat them when in these angry tempers? Ah! if we could make our way into many a household, and assist at the daily occupations of many a family, what sad exhibitions of pride should we witness, and of this spirit of rebellion which is the off-spring of nearly all unhappiness and misfortune! Take warning yourselves and bring up your children in the spirit of obedience and submission, and watch over their characters, for the results of a faulty education, and of pride nourished in the beginning are invariably sorrow

and bitterness, in other words, an almost insupportable existence.

We have all need to remind ourselves and to acknowledge that pride is the root of evil, pride which created and peopled hell. In spite of it we flatter ourselves and adore our own ideas, we make a law of our own opinion, and everything must give way to our desires. Oh! let us pray for the grace of humility of heart, let us pray for this humble love of Jesus, this submissive spirit, which will give us the force to conquer our own nature. Our souls too often resemble the fallen angels, and, as God has permitted that they should exercise, by what remains to them of power, a certain amount of empire over us, they understand how to foster this spirit of pride and rebellion in us.

We must humble and abase ourselves more and more, for our past life conveys to us many a sad experience, and whenever we have given way to proud rebellious feelings, shame, contempt, and humiliation in our own sight has followed, and we have felt to what a depth of degradation we had sunk. The sole reason of these tremendous falls is, that we wished to elevate ourselves too high. Let us hope all things from the goodness of the Lord, and let us say to Him: "Give me patience, obedience, humility, and meekness, virtues so unlike my nature, but so dear to Thy Heart. Oh! Mary! oh! my Mother! thou who art so sweet, so humble, obtain for me

this grace, which will change and soften me, and render me for ever submissive to the Will of my God."

Pride rebels, and God annihilates it; but when it comes to weakness, what must we say of it? I will tell you: first of all we must conceive a great pity for it. We must learn and know that actual malice in sin is rare; that pride such as Satan's is very rare; nevertheless that there are souls who share in this pride through weakness. We do not wilfully sin for the sake of sin; no, but we find in evil a sort of attraction which seduces us, an excuse for disobedience, an inclined plane strewn with roses, down which we glide almost imperceptibly. Our faults spring in a great measure from our weakness and infirmity. God knows it. This is no reason why we should give way to them, but it is a reason why we should hope for mercy and pardon. An angel swerved from the right path, and as his nature was gifted with a superior energy, he was precipitated into hell.

Look at the first man and the first woman, our fore-parents, from whom we have all inherited so sad a burden, in the presence of their God Whom they offended. They also had received great gifts from the Lord; which of us can imagine what was the beauty of original justice, what the state of those souls, free from the yoke of the senses, ruling over their own bodies, as over all created beings! How peaceful this kingdom, how blessed this dominion, exercised over all things and over themselves,

and which we have lost. It was Paradise upon earth! they talked with God! it was life without death! It contained but one probation for these unfortunate parents of the human race, and that was the command not to touch the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil. This fruit was beautiful to look upon, and Eve was seduced: the tempter came and said to her, "You shall have wealth, honours, Divine pleasures!" The unfortunate mother of the human race heard these words, and she repeated them to Adam, and both of them, by a frailty which our own frailty alone enables us to understand, transgressed the commandment of the Lord. Henceforth innocence was lost, justice, order, and the interior equilibrium of the soul overthrown! Henceforth we have had to suffer the shameful rebellions of a triple concupiscence, misery, want, sufferings, bitterness, death; and wherefore? Because our first parents, led away by frailty and by the seductions of pleasure, disobeyed God's law.

What remnants of this frailty do we find in ourselves, my children? Everywhere exist weakness and infirmity! We cannot retain a good thought for one short hour; what do I say, for an hour? No! not for a quarter of an hour! Our best resolutions hardly last for a whole day; the world fascinates and dazzles us; we give ourselves up to the pleasure of the moment. We hurry and rush hither and thither after what flatters our senses;

but when we have to do with the law of God, with the examples of the Gospel, when it comes to thinking of the supreme end of all lives, we find nothing in our hearts but idleness, weakness, and incapacity.

Let us reckon with ourselves. No doubt we have but little strength, but then have we asked for more? Have we often prayed? Have we had confidence in the Lord? Has our life been nourished upon prayer? No, we have been veritable children of Adam; original sin has branded and degraded us, and we have fallen incessantly. Ah! then now, at any rate, let us offer God our contrition; but this contrition, in order to be agreeable to Him, must be filled with confidence and love.

My God, I am feeble and infirm, and my life has been a succession of faults! How often have I descended the paths of sin! How many times have I forgotten the greatness of Thy mercy, and the loveliness of Thy glory! What has become of the innocence and purity of my early years? Oh! my God, when I think over the days and hours that are spent, when I look back upon the many years already passed away, I ask myself with sorrow, what remains? What good have I done? Alas! alas! I am frail and infirm. Oh! my God! Thou knowest it! Thou wilt raise me up, and supported by Thee, I shall yet hope for strength and victory.

My children, such are the feelings which should be yours. Here is what God requires of you; weep, sigh,

and be severe with yourselves; think of all your infirmities without ceasing, just as, a short time ago, you thought about the world. Deplore over these easy-going, slothful ways, over that negligence, that species of contempt for the things of God. Arm yourselves with a holy courage, show yourselves to yourselves such as you are; change your life, blush no longer for the Gospel; bear it for the future graven upon your foreheads. What, you still allow the world to trouble you! What! human respect still exists for you! You partake in frivolous, gossiping conversations, and you, Christian souls, you who have in your conscience a voice which condemns these things, you take a pleasure in them, you laugh over them like the others! Your curiosity even goes so far, as to be cruel enough to elicit the names of persons and things, and all through weakness! Is this leading a Christian life? What an enigma! You tremble at a light or profane word, and yet you think yourselves obliged to respond to it! Certainly, my children, politeness does not go so far as this, and I tell you, that in this display of weakness, you are guilty of a breach of honour; and I add, take care!

Ah! yes, our frailty is great indeed, but God knows it, and He will pardon it! Pride rebels, weakness misleads, and disorder is the ruin of the world.

By disorder, I do not mean the moral disorder of an individual life, I intend by this term to define the general

state of the life of the world, which truly is one of disorder. . . . Christians ought to be as one family of the faithful, encouraging one another with a holy emulation in propagating the love of God. Instead of this, what do we see around us? What is the life of our great cities, in our streets, in your houses? What pleasures! what luxuries! what joys! My children, is it order we find? Is this justice? Are these the thoughts, the desires, which please God? Are these feelings and wishes regulated as they should be? Are they aiming towards their rightful end? At this very hour, whilst we are tranquilly meditating under Divine influence, there is in the regions of darkness an innumerable crowd of lost souls, who have trodden the paths you are now treading, who have lived this life of the world, and who have earned therefrom their eternal damnation! These souls moan and lament now, for they are condemned without appeal, and why? what was their crime? The stream of their lives became troubled, they diverged from its rightful channel, they wandered hap-hazard, at will, at random, did nothing for God, but all for the time being, and finally death overtook them!

Ah! what a different death we witness when God summons us to the death-bed of true Christians, when we contemplate these chosen souls whom God calls to Himself. Doubtless, they fell into many a fault, they passed not unscathed through the temptations of

the world; but their consciences stood faithful, faith preserved her empire. Ah! my children, when I think that you all, without exception, may prepare this blessed end for yourselves! when I think that if you will but pray, God will grant you all necessary graces and benedictions! Only try, whilst humbling yourselves from the innermost depths of the heart, to deplore over what is in disorder in your lives, try to establish there, holy rules of conscience, to model them upon the Gospel: try every day to advance nearer and nearer to the true end; question yourselves, ask yourselves, "Where am I? Am I in the right way, in order, and in peace? Is it for thee, oh! Lord, that I live, that I suffer? My God, repair all that I have done to offend Thee, I wish to be entirely Thine!" Such language will bring down a blessing upon you, my children, and before quitting these sacred precincts, I conjure you to place yourselves in spirit at the foot of the cross, contemplate your Divine Saviour, see these wounds, this blood, these feet which have wearied themselves in the pursuit of your soul, these hands extended to bless you, this sacred mouth which has been so prodigal of heavenly counsel to you; and ask of Him why He died, wherefore these sufferings, wherefore these tortures, ask Him why He is hanging upon the cross, why He is abandoned of God and man? Ask Him the reason of all these fearful blood-sheddings. Ah! if you descend within your own soul, you will find the answer,

and you will know that it is you yourself, who by your sins, have caused the death of your God. Jesus Christ has loved you with a surpassing love, He has neglected nothing for the welfare of your soul, and to-day you refuse to give Him your heart, you will not serve Him! How have you responded to all His proofs of love, you, the blessed, the chosen of His Heart? What use have you made of His gifts, oh! faithless, ungrateful souls! Do you not now weep and sigh before the face of your God? Alas! my children, He waits but for this little sign in order to speak pardon to your souls, and to raise you again with His tender hand. There are no limits, no measures to His mercy, He forgives upon earth, in order to recompense and to crown in eternity.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE.

ON DEATH.

THE best fruit, my children, that we can gather from these holy exercises, is our advancement and strengthening in the Spirit of Faith.

You are well aware that what deceives us, and brings sorrow and sin into our lives, is that we do not judge of things from the stand-point of Faith, as God Himself judges and estimates them.

I wish now, in order to excite this holy desire of judging all things according to Faith, in your hearts, to propose to you a meditation upon death. It is a salutary subject of reflection, and one to which we should be ever recurring, since we are all hastening towards death with rapid strides.

What do we find about death in the teaching of the Holy Scriptures? Three things: 1stly, that death is the punishment and expiation of sin; 2ndly, that it is the end of earthly trials; 3rdly, that it is the beginning of all good things which are worthy of the title.

We must remember, then, in the first place, that death is the penance inflicted by God for the expiation of sin. You know the terms of the law which was delivered to our first parents. "If you eat of the fruit of the tree of good and of evil, you shall die." These words undoubtedly referred to the death of the body, as well as to that of the soul. This is why St. Paul teaches us that by sin, death entered into the world, and the sage had already declared that death was not of God, and that He was grieved at the death of thos whom He had brought into life.

Thus death came into the world by sin, and with sin. God, who had destined us for privileges and for immortality, even that of the body, permitted that this just chastisement should be the reparation for our crimes, and, as it were, the acquittance of our debts. This is why Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, suffered death : for, wishing to satisfy the justice of His Father, and to take upon Himself the redemption of the whole world from sin, He encountered the great penance inflicted upon the human race, and had to submit Himself; He had to die. He therefore, of His own free will, accepted this obligation of death ; for the law of death was not framed for His pure, innocent nature, for His Sacred Humanity, substantially incorporate with the Incarnate Word; but He wished to acquit the debt due for the sins of men, and therefore He submitted to the law of death. Mary,

although preserved from the grievous heritage of original sin had also to submit to this law ; and because she was to be associated with the Sacrifice of her Son, she had to die !

We must die, my children, that is certain. As the years pass, we perceive all disappearing around us, gaps are made, generations succeed each other and pass away. The faintest recollection, the bare name survives of those who have lived amongst us. And we shall pass away in our turn, perhaps soon, for we are profoundly ignorant of the moment already determined in God's decrees, in which we are to leave this earth.

All that we know is, that from all eternity there has been a time appointed for us to pay our share of the great debt of sin.

In this thought, my children, there is a useful lesson by which we should profit, without allowing ourselves to be saddened thereby, and that is, that every life is destined to make this act of immolation, brought upon us by sin. In our hours of silence and recollection, especially during those of retreat, we must accept this law of Our Lord in all its plenitude, and submit ourselves unto death, as the chastisement which we have deserved, not only as inheritors of the sin of our first parents, but also as free and responsible actors in the woful drama of the world's iniquities.

Whatever may have been our lives, in whatever state we

may be to-day, we are sinners, we have sinned, and we shall perhaps sin again. God requires payment of the debt we owe to Him; His justice reclaims it. "Oh! my God, I accept of death, and I offer Thee my life, at the hour which Thou hast appointed, for the expiation of my sins."

I earnestly wish, my children, that in Christian families, in Christian souls, in each one of you in particular, there existed a holy disposition to learn and understand how to make this supreme sacrifice to God, when the moment shall have arrived. I wish that all might learn how to die victims of God, in union with the divine Victim of Calvary, who consummated in His death the expiation and reparation of the whole world. Otherwise, look, my children, you go and come, you live and die, without, if I dare say so, knowing what you are doing. We do not consider sufficiently that we ought to constitute ourselves victims. Ah! in the prayers, at any rate, with which we are surrounded, in the sacraments which are given us, in the exhortations addressed to us at the solemn moment of our agony, we must seek and find the grace to enter thoroughly into the spirit of sacrifice, offering our death as the expiation of sin. How mighty and fruitful is that death, which, if accepted and united with that of Jesus upon the Cross, can make atonement for a long life of sin, and receive abundant benedictions!

My children, we can learn beforehand to put this condi-

tion of an expiatory victim for sin into practice. If an occasion of self-sacrifice presents itself before our death, if God asks it of us, let us not refuse Him! In the midst of the world's tribulations, when you are wearied with the briars and thorns so thickly strewn over the pathways of the earth, whither do you turn your thoughts? To whom do you look for comfort? Detach yourselves from these creatures to whom you are so tightly bound, if you would save your souls. But again, where are your thoughts? What is the meaning of this fertile, vivid imagination, which comes and goes, and distracts you without any solidity or steadfastness? Wherefore this dissipation and frivolity to which you give way? Wherefore this agitation, this anxiety, this attachment to things which last but a day, which hinders you from grasping the truths of Faith? Wherefore, O my God! cannot my heart and soul enter into that freedom which Thou offerest them? Why can I not leave behind me, as a heavy, wearisome burden, all that Thou lovest not, all that is displeasing unto Thee? Ah! my children, here would be a good preparation for death, here would be expiation and reparation in advance. Do not say it would be impossible to do this; do not pretend that nature would revolt from this sacrifice, and above all, do not sit still and despond, for it is the devil only who bids you be discouraged; this very moment in which I am addressing you, if you do not open your heart to Hope, if you do not feel the necessity

of devoting yourselves to the Lord, to repair and to expiate the past, to recommence a new life, in order to know how to die well, you are caught in the snares of the enemy! In order to free yourselves, you must elevate your hearts by faith, you must hope against all hope.

Have you forgotten that God is all-powerful, that His goodness is infinite? Shall his graces and His promises be vain? Cannot you once for all surrender yourselves to Him, and remain faithful to Him? What else have you to do upon earth? How will you pass your days and your years, if you do not root out from your hearts these fatal attachments which hamper and fetter you? Give to God all that He asks of you, and may this sacrifice prepare you for the supreme sacrifice. Death is the end of our woes, of our trials, of our tribulations, of our faults, and of all our troubles. Is death then so much to be dreaded? Is life so very sweet and happy? If I dared, I would reckon with you, and ask you where are your happy days, where are the years which you can with truth call prosperous? Where have you found Paradise upon earth? Where has your soul discovered unalloyed felicity? Ah! there is a law, in the merciful decrees of the Lord, that here below we shall find no rest! We are ever and ever progressing onwards, and our road lies incessantly through trial after trial. Are not sorrows needful for us, my children? If pleasures and enjoyment were lavished upon us, if we never encountered deception

and disillusion, alas ! O God ! our hearts would soon cease to think of Thee ! It is our trials, griefs, faults, combats, and frequent falls, which recall us to Thy Feet !

We require sorrow to enlighten us, to sanctify us, and to remind us unceasingly of that final and supreme end to which we are hastening, and to repeat to us that we are bound for our home in heaven. Ah, well, my children, will it be such a very great misfortune to have no more trials, no more conflicts, no more temptations, no more sins ? When we have wept for our faults, wept for the sad infirmities of our lives, when we have prepared ourselves for death by years of recollection and fidelity, what have we to fear so much ?

Ah ! I do not deny that there will be many a heartrending pang, many a cruel parting, many dearly loved ones, cherished friends, whom we shall have to leave behind, many a tender, close embrace, from which we shall have to tear ourselves. I do not deny that here is trial and sorrow indeed ! My calling has often led me amidst such scenes of grief and bitterness of heart ; I have seen many a tear shed, and I could find no word of blame. Nevertheless, I repeat to you what I have often said by the bed of the dying : death does but rend asunder temporary ties, in order to create new and better ones. Do not pity those who die in the grace of God. They are not to be pitied, but rather let their example teach you how to prepare for death yourself. Death is as the wind which blows,

and bears away the falling leaf, it is life which disappears with all it has of sweetness and charm, but also with its pain, trial, and suffering. "My God! I will never offend Thee more! I shall be delivered from myself, from my heart which oppresses me, from my mind which wearies me! My proud, fickle thoughts give me neither rest nor peace; my conscience reproaches me; and the enemy is for ever returning to the charge! creatures deprive me of Thy love! Thy Cross is for ever slipping from my grasp! What a grievous, hateful warfare! Oh! my God, give me my liberty! death is freedom! I will not then fear death, I will devote myself wholly, entirely to God, I will flee from the evil which He detests; I will take refuge in His bosom; I will seek shelter and support in prayer; every day I will recommence a new life, but also every day will recommence to die. Oh! my God! I wish for death! Oh! Lord, how gladly would I die! I will not invoke death in bitterness of spirit, in despair, in desolation; I would not wish to die from weariness of living, but when it is Thy will. Oh! my Lord, when Thou dost order it, I will meet death with trust and confidence." What must we do my children, to acquire these motives for confidence? We must hate what God hates, and banish all affection for sin.

What else have you to do in this world, than to gain this freedom of the children of the Lord, which establishes the soul in a holy and pure direction, which takes prece-

dence of death, and I may almost say, goes to God before its time ?

Two days ago I received a touching letter from the country, telling me of the death of a young girl who expired amidst frightful sufferings. After a prolonged delirium, she had two days' respite, in which to compose her mind and heart before God. She was warned of her danger, and told that there was no hope of her life. Her life had been innocent; she lay tranquil and smiling, only murmuring, "I did not think it was so easy to die !"

Ah ! well indeed does God understand how to prepare souls in secret ! but we must correspond to His wishes ! I entreat you, let us shut our heart to the world, let us close every door and every avenue, let us forget its language. Death in the eyes of that world without, is a something painful, horrible, inexorable ; there are souls to whom it inspires an invincible horror. My God ! teach us, on the contrary, to love death, because it is the beginning of all happiness ! Tell me, my children, is not our greatest misfortune on earth our continual feeling of opposition to God ? Alas ! our corrupt nature is loth to love God, loth to adore and to serve Him ! And nevertheless God is riches, beauty, goodness, perfection, and holiness ; God alone merits to be loved ! Well then, death awaits us to convey us across this grand pass, and after our sacrifice God gives Himself to us in the fulness of His wealth, splendour, and beatitude. Ah ! how He will

then recompense us for our woes and sufferings! The more you shall have suffered, the more you shall have worked, the more richly will He bless you. With what generosity will He place the crown upon your heads! How beautiful and radiant will be this crown, if you have been brave and faithful! My children, God awaits you at the goal, He will have submitted you to temporary trial and death, but throughout all eternity, He will shower His blessings upon you, and this is the eternal end for which He has predestinated you.

Now tell me, are these your daily thoughts? Could you translate your existence, your words, your feelings, by this deep inward conviction that you are awaiting your only real happiness on the other side of the grave? Would any one believe, to see and to hear you, that you are predestinated for heaven, for everlasting beatitude, for felicity which knows no measure? You are ceaselessly regretting this present life, and yet it is death which is the giver of eternal treasures. Picture to yourselves how it will be with you at that supreme moment, whose coming you cannot escape, at that moment when all mortal things will fade away, when all barriers will be removed. After the final hours of anguish, you will enter into a rest unspeakable, into the most brilliant of lights; your heart and your mind will seek after nothing else but God; the world will have disappeared, and all will have ended for you upon earth; you will feel the irresistible, indescribable necessity

to be united with God. You will possess that sovereign and infinite good for ever and ever! There you will be at rest, there your soul will rejoice everlastingly, and, restored to her true life, to her original destination, will rush up to meet God, with a heavenly thirst beyond human conception here below.

Do not imagine that by this I wish to forbid the hope of retaining the ties of legitimate earthly affections in heaven. Oh! no, all that is true, all that is good, all that is pure, all that has its foundation in God and in His holy Will, remains unchanged there.

There you will, assuredly, still love those whom you have loved in the fear of God on earth; there you will think of them; there you will be able to succour and comfort them, and God, in His watchful Providence, will make known to you the necessities of these dear souls whom you have left behind, that you may sustain and help them. I ask you, are not these ineffable consolations?

Courage then, my children! Do not weep too bitterly for those who have gone before you. In your turn, when you are about to quit this earth, say to your children: "Weep not, for I am going to God; I shall await you in heaven; I shall pray for you!" Their hearts will retain these holy words spoken by a beloved mother, and God hearing them, will pour His best blessings upon you and yours.

Death then brings with it a wealth of consolation, it is

the end of all evils, and the beginning of all true happiness. Ah! pray often for this holy death, and if there is something which binds you overmuch to the things of the earth, if the fascinations of pleasure darken the light of truth in your hearts, pray, until you shall have obtained the grace to judge all things, as God sees and judges them.

My children, I will leave you with these words; our retreat is almost over; may its remembrance never be effaced from your souls. Love your God; seek Him; do not attach yourselves to this fleeting world. See how all therein dies! Give your hearts to those affections alone which God inspires and sanctifies. Have confidence! God will prepare you for the final journey; He will come Himself with His angels and with Mary, His Mother, to receive you, to shower blessings on you, and to crown you in heaven.

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE.

ON THE CULTIVATION OF THE SOUL.

TO-DAY and to-morrow, my children, you have to make certain resolutions before God, to seek what He requires of you, and what are the fruits you should draw from this retreat. It is not that God exacts of you anything extraordinary; but in descending into the depths of your hearts, after prayer and meditation, you will, of necessity, find out what you have to reform, to develop, and to ameliorate in your lives. You will thus have proved what are the requirements of your souls and the sources of your faults. Here is where the remedy must be applied.

To aid you the better to make your new resolves, to aid you to place yourselves in this spirit of faith, which is the true spirit of God, I wish at this moment to remind you of a few points in the parable of the barren fig-tree. The parable signifies, that God even in His most severe and legitimate exigencies, even in His threatenings and chastisements, ever causes mercy and goodness to super-

abound: of this you will be convinced. The lord of a vineyard visits his property, he meets with a fig-tree, he seeks for fruit, but finds nothing but leaves—a poor, vain produce! So he says to the dresser of the vineyard, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The labourer replies, "Lord, let it alone this year, until I dig about it and dung it. And if happily it bear fruit: but if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down." The Gospel does not tell us whether, after this year, the master returned to see if the tree was bearing fruit.

We may gather three lessons from this parable. The first is, that God seeks to find fruit in our souls; the second, that He judges and punishes those who do not bring forth fruit; finally, the third is, that He is ever ready to come to the assistance of those souls who require a new culture, and to cure and sanctify them.

God seeks to find fruits in souls. Our Saviour has said to His Apostles, and by them to us, "I am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing." Whence we may conclude this elementary truth: that God wishes grace to fructify in our hearts; He does not wish this grace to remain barren, in other words, a life devoid of good works. God is the Heavenly Cultivator; He has sown, planted, pruned, watered, and cultivated His vine; that is to say, He has poured heavenly graces into our hearts, He comes at

His appointed hour, at the epochs fixed in the immutable decrees of His Providence, and if He finds this tree barren, this heart without a virtue, this life making no progress, what does He do? He pronounces judgment.

You know, my children, that God awaits you at the end of this life to judge you, even previous to the final and solemn day of reckoning; but remember that God, Who sees you at every instant, also judges you at every instant. God knows all you do and whither you are going. As Creator, as Father, and as Redeemer, He has given life unto you, and has implanted in your souls all the principles of salvation, all the teachings, all the helps, all the precious inspirations of grace, all the light, all the strength needful for your progress and fructification, if I may use the term. He has therefore every right to look for fruit in you; and, instead, what does He usually find? Leaves! only leaves! that which shines before the eyes of the world, that which glitters on the outside in order to attract attention. But under all these leaves no fruit! Useless, barren tree! Ungrateful, barren soul!

At the solemn hour when our fate will be decided for all eternity, if we thus bring to our Saviour a soul without fruit, without works, without virtues, without progress, without efforts, what sentence shall we hear except that terrible condemnation: "Cast it into outer darkness, into everlasting fire?"

Ah! my children, may the lesson this sentence teaches

never be forgotten by us! Remember that in your hearts you have a field to cultivate, that you must bring forth the fruits of that seed which your heavenly Father has sown deep down in your hearts! Recollect that God has a right to exact from you daily fruits of courage, patience, submission, and the faithful accomplishment of His precepts. My children, supposing Our Lord were to appear in this church at this very moment, if He were to question you, one after the other, as to the fruits that are ripening in your souls, namely His graces, should you have much else save leaves to offer to Him?—an outside show, and nothing within. And after that? How about the fulfilment of your duties, and devotion to the Divine Will? How as to love for your Saviour—He Who bids you follow in His footsteps, imitate His virtues, His humility, His zeal? Alas! I fear He would find scanty fruits.

And supposing judgment were to be pronounced at this moment, where should you go? What would become of you? Alas! how many lives are there which shine brightly before the eyes of the world, and give but a faint glimmer in God's sight! My children, there are precious hours bringing graces on their wings which will never come again. Fear, then, to refuse now to God what He asks of you. What! do you not feel sufficiently brave to cast on one side these extravagant dresses and ornaments, which in the eyes of God are nothing but blameable vanities? Adorn your lives, instead, with sound virtues, with patience

and humility; throw off from you all bitterness and malice, clothing yourselves with the raiment of charity, according to the precepts of the Gospel. Do these things; let others see that you are the children of your heavenly Father, of your Mother, Holy Church. Let it be seen and felt! I do not predict that you will lead a perfect life even then; but if you thoroughly understand God's grace, if you know how to receive that which will gain for you pardon and strength, and will never permit of your being cast down and discouraged, then, after perhaps many years of waiting for the Lord, the day of spiritual harvest will arrive, and your soul will be hidden in divine fruits

I can almost fancy I see Our Lord passing by His fig-tree; something in it attracts His attention; it is a fine tree, covered with verdant foliage. . . . . Let us draw near to receive the sweet radiance of a look from Our Saviour, this friendly gaze seeking to find fruits of holiness within us. He looks into your soul, as at this moment He is contemplating it from the recesses of the Tabernacle, and, instead of a harsh sentence, He says, "Oh, poor soul! thou hast then no fruits to show? I will wait yet awhile; cultivate, seek and toil; I will wait for thee, but I shall come at last in mine own good time, expecting to find fruit."

The Gospel does not tell us if the Master returned, if the fig-tree was still barren, and if it was finally accursed

and thrown into the fire. It might be that it was so. Does not death come when we least expect it? Are there many deaths which have been anticipated? The final hour arrives, as we are told in the Holy Scriptures, "like a thief in the night," when least thought of, when least expected. What conclusion must we draw, except that we must be always ready, because the Lord will come at the hour when we least look for Him.

Let us return once more to the parable. The metaphor of the master of the household cultivating his field, indicates to us that our souls are a field which requires tilling; and a careful labourer will spare no pains to render the ground fertile. Hardly does a weed show itself but it is eradicated. Look at a vine! how it is dressed and watered, and the very soil at its roots tended, and all that it may derive strength and refreshment day by day! Can you say the same of your hearts and souls, of God's designs within you, finally, of your lives as Christians, which ought to be cultivated according to the spirit of the Gospel? Of a truth, when we compare spiritual culture with that of earthly fields and vineyards, what negligence do we discover! what thorns and weeds! what a number of parasites! And you expect that such a spectacle should gladden the eyes of the Lord!

My children, if we had true self-respect and a real knowledge of our own dignity—if we felt where we are going, and with what conditions we shall reach our

destination, if we understood by what efforts we can gain heaven, we should wish to possess all virtues, especially those which God distinctly presents to ourselves, those which best correspond to our characters, and which divine grace points out to us. We should arm ourselves with the utmost courage, we should watch day and night, we should present the holy fruits of divine grace to the eyes of Our Lord.

Well, my children, God awaits you! He wishes you to hope all things of His goodness, but at the same time you yourselves must not be idle. Forget the past, leave it behind you; God will dispose of it, and will blot out its recollection; think only of the present moment, that which alone you can call your own—hasten ever forwards, that at last you may reach the goal. Blessed is the soul which pauses not in its search after spiritual fruits and divine virtues!

My children, such is your present disposition, I trust, and I bless God for it! Do not lose heart! Your soul is generous, hesitate no longer! Do not listen to the sophistry of the enemy, who is ever placing hindrances and thousands of idle reasonings in your path! God wishes that you should surmount all obstacles: forward then! He Himself awaits you at the bourn, with His treasures of eternal reward.

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST.

E have but a little time, my children, in which to occupy ourselves, directly, with our Divine Saviour, and yet we must not part without having spoken of His public Life, and considered the wonders of His Love for us.

Jesus came to teach and to save us, and has lavished upon us every proof of the most ardent love: He asks for our love in return, and He asks for it, for the sake of our happiness and our comfort. The example of our Saviour, and the imitation of His virtues, are dear to us; and nevertheless, it will happen that even with the intention of drawing near to Him, of following in His footsteps, of practising His lessons, the soul is disquieted and uneasy, something seems wanting to her, some aid, some surer light, some support, or perhaps a firmer will.

Therefore, in order to assist you, my children, in re-establishing within your hearts this Divine order and

inward peace, which spring from a life in conformity with the Life of our blessed Saviour, I will try and meditate with you upon His adorable history; then we will compare our life with His, and in humble sincerity of heart, will try and conform our weakness to His perfection.

What did Our Lord come to teach the world? Think for a moment. You believe with a sure and lively faith that He is your God, that He was made Man, and that in His Sacred Humanity He practised all virtues, and gave the example of all perfections. You believe that He came to be your model, that His life and His words should be your rule; you fully accept this declaration which He made: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Well then, my children, and what is the first thing that strikes us about Jesus? It is poverty the most absolute. Jesus Christ chose poverty; He was born in indigence, He worked as a poor man, He lived as a poor man—He, the dispenser of all treasures, had not, as He says, where to lay His head, had not even a friendly roof to shelter His birth and the first days of His human life. During the exile in Egypt and in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, we perceive none of fortune's gifts, nothing which betokens one of those enjoyments and comforts, which are to us necessities of life. He accompanied His father to work, and we may even go so far as to believe, with the saints and doctors, that He held out His hand to receive

the wages of His toil. When His public life began, He worked miracles, and multiplied prodigies to cure human infirmities, but it is not written that He performed a single miracle to provide for His own wants. He depended entirely upon the charity of others. With great consolation, I may add, that holy women gave Him to eat, a blessed heritage to which you, my children, have succeeded; this is a crown which belongs to you, and which you understand nobly how to wear. You love to feed the poor of Christ, to aid in works of charity, and thus you are the daughters and sisters of those holy women who supplied the needs of our Saviour, who gave Him His daily bread, who did not abandon Him on Calvary, when all others, alas! had fled!

When we reflect, my children, we cannot but feel that the idea of a Saviour, rich, powerful, surrounded by worldly honours and luxury, would have raised in our hearts invincible feelings of repugnance. Instead of this, we have to adore and to cherish a Saviour, poor, indigent, denuded of every earthly comfort, whilst showering upon us every kind of blessing. Such was His life, such His choice! Verily a holy choice! And when upon the mountain, He utters that admirable sermon which opens with beatitudes, what does He say: "Blessed are the poor! Blessed are the poor in spirit!" What indeed, my children, is the true Christian spirit, that which has distinguished the Church from all ages,

but this spirit of detachment, this spiritual poverty, which may be practised in the midst of riches, in the bosom of opulence itself? How does Jesus warn the rich in His sweet and paternal, yet firm and strenuous language! "Ah!" cries He, "how hard is it to the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven;" repeating, "Blessed are the poor;" and going even farther, he launches forth a terrible anathema against the rich who make bad use of their wealth.

What conclusion must we draw from this, my children? When we contemplate our Saviour, poor and denuded, when we find praises of poverty ever in His mouth, we must not immediately fancy that all are to renounce the riches and good things of this world which they possess by the most legitimate rights. No! for Providence has ordered, that there shall always be rich people, in His wise decrees for the good of nations. How then are we to resemble our Divine Saviour? It may not be for you, my children, that these words of the evangelical counsels were spoken; be it so: but at any rate you can understand with what joy certain souls, struck by the lessons and examples of their Divine Lord, leave the world, renouncing all, to bury themselves within a cloister, having nothing, possessing nothing, aspiring to nothing here below, desiring no other treasure, no other wealth, no other love than the Heart of Jesus!

As for you, my children, you may gain as much, aye

and even more merit, if, detaching your hearts from the good things which you have received, clinging no longer to the world, but resting only on the Lord, using the things of this world without misusing them, moderating and regulating your expenditure, giving no place to frivolity, to luxury, to the love of idle pleasures, retrenching all superfluities whilst remembering what is due to your social position, you yield, as to a duty, to the exigencies around you, at the same time ruling over your thoughts, withdrawing your heart from all these things, to give it entirely to the good gifts of grace and hopes of heaven. It is prayer, it is the Spirit of Faith, which will give you this detachment, this spiritual poverty. There are in the world women, who after having given way to the love of luxury, to a taste for lavish expenditure and idle extravagances, have one day come to feel this influence of grace, have discovered this treasure of spiritual poverty, and who now, without any affectation, without anything extreme calculated to offend others in their conduct, know how to measure and approportion the usage of earthly riches according to the Spirit of the Gospel. Their consciences would suffer, were there aught in their expenses which the love of Jesus Christ could not justify.

Be very careful then, my children, and when making your resolutions in presence of Our Lord, Who was poor when on earth, do not forget those severe words which He

addressed to the rich: "Woe unto you rich, for you have your consolation in this world!"

Regulate your expenses carefully; let there be nothing exaggerated in your dress. Wherefore should you load your persons with superfluous ornaments? Are you any the better for them? Does God esteem you one whit the more? Do not the poor sometimes suffer for your frivolities? When you humour every whim, and know not how to resist the acquisition of anything that delights your eye, how often have you not brought privation, if not exactly want, to your doors? Do you fancy that such is the road to your Saviour, and to that poverty He loved so well?

No, indeed! Learn, then, the inestimable value of a wise moderation in the use of riches, and the joy of conscience which is to be found when you deprive yourselves of certain superfluities and idle extravagances, which can offer no justification save that they are the consequences of a species of madness. God has given you the good things of this earth, but not that you should abuse them, or scatter them to the winds.

If, on the other hand, my children, you are placed in circumstances where privations are continually imposed upon you, if Providence has given you a secondary, inferior position as regards fortune and the enjoyments of the world, do not complain. Ah! do not murmur! but kneel down at the foot of the Cross, contemplate your

Saviour, accompany Him in spirit along the paths which He trod, and oh! Christian soul, rejoice in your poverty; your salvation is far easier, you have fewer obstacles to vanquish, you are not led away and fascinated by the seductions of that wealth, which would obscure the purity and plenitude of the light from heaven which beams upon you. No, of a truth, never repine! Resign yourself, accept the position in which you are placed, do not murmur, for you possess the treasure which Our Lord Himself chose and preferred to all others.

I entreat you all, my children, as you wish to acquire this spirit of poverty and detachment, which is the spirit of Jesus and the fundamental principle of the Gospel, love to give alms and to work deeds of charity. In this respect, I know how possible it is to deceive oneself! I am well aware of your generosity, I know that it is never exhausted, and is ever being solicited. But do you really believe that you give as much as you might give? Do you give to the poor all that lies in your power to bestow? Are alms dear to your heart? These works of Christian charity, so manifold and so blessed, are maintained by your assistance only: alms is the true mission of the rich: you give a great deal, but do you give enough? Rich people are sent into the world to give, as doctors are sent to cure, as priests are sent to teach. This is so true, that at the last judgment, upon the alms you have bestowed will depend your salvation

I am sure then, my children, that you will, if possible, yet increase their measure; you will endeavour, as far as lies in your power, to minister to the poor around you, and you will not grudge making some little sacrifice, retrenching some of your expenses, denying yourselves some of those superfluities about which I have already warned you.

So much for poverty. But if I am to complete the device of Jesus Christ, if I am to be penetrated with His Spirit, if I wish to learn the very soul of the Christian life, I must contemplate the Saviour under some of His other attributes likewise. What then was He? He was the Man of Sorrows, the most despised, the most scorned of men. He wished, He chose, He gloried that it should be so. He embraced contempt and opprobrium, as men run after honours. They wished to make Him king, He fled into the desert; and later on, drinking the chalice to the dregs, He seemed, in some way, to multiply the means of receiving outrage and humiliation. He, the most just and most innocent of men, He chose confusion, ignominy and not only obscurity, but every species of degradation, injury, blasphemy, and imprecation. Look at Him during the Passion: see how He receives blows and spittings, how He is buffeted, trodden under foot, and scourged. Only look at Him! And we who are His disciples, His children, who bear His name, how shall we imitate Him in this love of the world's contempt? My children, you

are not called upon to go in search of outrages. We have heard of saints to whom God gave this insatiable thirst after humiliation, but in the ordinary Christian life, it is not so. Nevertheless God in His never-failing Providence gives us almost every day some exercise against self-love, against the vanity that is inherent in us. Yes, oh my God! thanks to Thy bounty and to Thy tenderness, there will always be obligations of suffering in this respect. It may be by an unjust word, a want of respect, or a deception. But then, how do we act, my children? We rebel, we feel within us the workings of pride which swells itself, puffs itself up, which looks for nothing save a humble submission and the flatterings of praise on every side. Oh! how far are we from the life of Jesus Christ! In the days of our youth, when we feed upon the desire of pleasing, upon all which flatters our self-love and vanity, how far are we from the despised, rejected Saviour! Nothing must annoy you, nothing must wound you; you do not know how to bear, I do not say scorn, but the very smallest want of consideration. And who are you then? what did Jesus, your example? What did He choose? Poverty and humiliation. It was to expiate your pride, your self-love, and to teach you a great lesson. What did He constantly preach? what has He taught? Always humility, that is to say the love of God, even unto sacrifice and contempt of oneself. Alas! this sentiment of self-contempt ought not to be so difficult a one.

We have sufficient material within us make us to despise ourselves, and if our lives were laid open to the eyes of men, if we were known for exactly what we are, or what we have been, ah, what a small amount of respect would our imposing exterior receive ! When one sees so much that is lamentable within oneself, we must at least humiliate ourselves before God, if we cannot do so before men !

My children, do not let us seek for so much consideration from others, it is not fair to expect it. And yet the world is filled with wounded vanity and hurt feelings ; everywhere the tone of bitterness is heard. We quarrel with those who displease us, we hate one another, we abuse one another, and then after this, we sometimes come and communicate together. . . . How sad it is ! I implore of you, my children, now at this moment when you are about to prostrate yourselves at the feet of Our Lord who was humiliated, torn and bruised, overwhelmed with injuries for your sakes, cast out from you all resentment ; forgive as God forgives you, so that when you leave this sanctuary, there may not be a single ill-feeling amongst you. Leave behind you all vanity, self-love, exaction, susceptibility and discord ; forget it all, let it all vanish ! And how must you do this ? By praying that you may be united to the Heart of Jesus Christ, Who was meek and humble. Ah ! how He felt that you would have need of His example to enable you to fight this ever-recurring war against pride and vanity ! Learn, then, to

be humble with Jesus ; you at least who are Christian and pious women !

Together with poverty and love of contempt, what else was there in our Divine Master? There was the pain and suffering of His soul, and the profound grief of His heart. What we dread above all things is what He chose. And at the end of His career, not content with His watchings, with His fastings, with His works, with His humiliations, with His image of the Cross which He had borne and implanted in His heart from His birth, He chose to fill up the measure, to make torture superabound, to suffer all the most terrible anguish, to receive the embraces of an agony, of all deaths the most terrible— all this, you know it well, freely, voluntarily, out of love for us. Here is an example ! But we, what are our feelings with regard to pain and trial, moral suffering, illness and infirmities? what complainings, what useless rebellion ! Nevertheless every day brings fresh troubles ; do what we will, there will always be contradictions, crosses and sufferings here below ; we may daily sigh after repose and happiness, but we shall never find them upon earth, and God be blessed that it is so ! . . . . Well then, my children, you must consent to suffer. I do not say that you are obliged to cultivate that heroic desire of the saints who longed for suffering and grief as their sweetest refreshment, but contemplate our Divine Saviour, listen to Him saying, "My soul is sorrowful even unto

death." The Divine Saviour, in the ardent desire He felt to sacrifice Himself, found neither rest nor relief save in suffering. It was in anguish that He breathed. He suffered, He wept, He sighed; but ever, whilst imploring His Father to remove this chalice, He rejoiced in having to suffer.

My children, here is the mystery of the Cross. Throughout the Christian life, throughout this life which you have chosen to lead, I adjure you to consider that Jesus Christ embraced pain and suffering voluntarily for us, that He loved them to excess for the expiation of your vanity, your delicacy, your weakness, your love of pleasure. All our lives long, we rush after enjoyment, after the satisfaction of the affections of the heart and our earthly desires. . . . But as for sacrifice, mortification, suffering, grief and pain, as for remaining in the order which God has sanctioned, we know not what it means. Then, asearth, do what we may, never satisfies our desires, the soul is agitated, disquieted; the imagination is excited, the heart troubled: my God, what storms! what tempests! But oh, my soul, whither then are you bound? What seek you? Do you hope to find here below the complete fulfilment of happiness? Accumulate all that you can, go on and on, think of nothing but the realization of your own desires, of enjoyment and distraction, in spite of all, you will suffer in this world, and in the next God will strike you with His hand.

But you, my children, who wish to assimilate your lives with that of your Saviour, you who cherish His heart, who love to muse upon His mysteries, try to accept your sorrows with patience; meet sufferings with sweetness and resignation. I do not tell you to love them, to rejoice in them. . . . And again, is it not true that in prayer, in communion, even when your pain and grief is most heavy and most keenly felt, is it not true that you have experienced wonderful joys, because you were in union with the Saviour, because you bore your cross with Him? Ah! here are the true pleasures of a pious and faithful life! You have peace, you rejoice, because you are in order, in the right path! because you are becoming ever more and more detached from those grievous chains which gall us and drag us down to earth, to luxury, pleasure, vanity and all that can fascinate and disquiet us.

I have been speaking of the true Spirit of Jesus; without doubt it entails sacrifices, but you are worthy to offer those sacrifices. Do you ask, my children, how you are to penetrate your souls with this holy disposition? I will answer as I told you at the beginning. Pray; turn all your efforts into prayers, fortify your vigilance of every day and every hour by prayer. Draw near to your Saviour, turn towards Him at every moment, to pray to Him, to supplicate, to conjure Him to assist you! Ah, when we see a soul that is veritably

poor, humble and patient, when we can look into a heart filled with the true Spirit of Jesus, what edification, what beauty, what peace, what happiness, what rest we find! It is an enchanted spot; nothing on earth is to be compared with a soul thus united with its Saviour! For those souls who are nourished with His Spirit, who often partake of His banquet, whose sole wish is day by day to give Him new proofs of love, all these things of which I have spoken to you are neither dreams nor idle theories: they are living realities; holy realities, which you all, my children, may bring into your lives, by means of which you will find solid and lasting happiness!

Pray then; pray until you are one with Jesus Christ: pray to Mary to enrol you under the standard of her Son! Never was there a more acceptable prayer; never was there an hour more blessed than that hour of triumph in which we gain a victory over ourselves: it is a triumph upon earth, and it is a triumph in heaven!

SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE.

ON SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

MY CHILDREN.—We are drawing near to the end of our retreat, the grace of God is in your hearts, and I am sure that you will pass the remainder of this day in peace. Forget your troubles, your disquietudes; gather up all your strength, try and penetrate your heart with the feelings that will draw it closest to God. You are now upon the eve of a communion which should be more fervent than any preceding one, and to which great graces are attached. Therefore I counsel you to give one day more to retreat, there to remain peaceably with God, far from the noise and dissipation of the world.

What shall I say to you, as a final instruction? I wish to try and establish within us those dispositions towards God, which should be found at such a time. Yours are good, I doubt not, and nevertheless there may be much yet remaining for you to ask for, an increase of light to be obtained, better resolutions to be taken.

Well then, my children, let us make a classification; let us establish three classes of souls, and as it were three categories of spiritual dispositions.

I will begin by telling you that the first is not to be found here, and notwithstanding, I must allude to it. There is a condition of soul, compatible up to a certain point, with the desire of sanctification and salvation, which consists in hesitation and vacillation, from want of the courage requisite to do violence to self and to gain a victory over self. That soul wishes and does not wish. It feels that God ought to be obeyed, that the inspirations of grace ought to be followed, but the heart sinks, the hands fall inertly, and it remains just where it was. No resolution, no generous determination is taken. There are sacrifices to be made in the heart, in daily life, in old established habits, but that soul says: "I cannot:" it stands wavering, and finally draws back. How long will this paralysing condition last? Till when? Until death, perhaps!

My children, delay does not remove obstacles, it diminishes no difficulties; the mind does not become more enlightened; nor is God contented! life drags wearily along, and God only knows how rapid the descent is! Ah, my children, we must pray for these souls, for they are sadly to be pitied. If they could assist with you at this retreat, and reconquer the life and energy which are wanting to them, what a resurrection might we be-

hold! We must compassionate them and pray for them; it is a conversion to undertake and by no means an easy one. If we fail, it is because we do not pray: to wish, is to pray; to fight, is to pray; to conquer, is to pray.

But here is a second spiritual state, which will perhaps be more applicable to you. There are in certain lives, fixed habits and decided tastes, virtues which are not practised, faults which are cherished and never struggled against. These persons are embarrassed, entangled in the spirit of the world; they persist in neglecting to listen to the true maxims of the Gospel, and linger far from the imitation of Our Blessed Lord: nevertheless, up to a certain point, they are desirous of doing better. But here is what happens: in this frame of mind one argues, one calculates, one makes certain arrangements with oneself how far, and no farther, one may go; saying to oneself: "After all, this is not necessary, I have no occasion to change my life; no reformation, no transformation is absolutely required. I intend to gain my salvation, but my habits need not be changed. How, must I attack my tastes, surmount my repugnances, bring my senses into subjection? Assuredly not. Must I condemn myself to a perpetual vigilance, to an unceasing constraint? No, God does not exact this: I will go on living as I have done." This is to say, that of the end one makes the means, and of the means, the end. Instead of looking towards the end as the end, instead of looking to

God as God, instead of taking the precepts of the Gospel as the rule, direction, and guide of life, instead of regulating and reforming the character according to the Will of God, and by the voice of conscience, instead of following the one true path which leads to salvation; instead of looking incessantly, I repeat, towards this as our end, one sees but one end, but one principle of life: that is to adhere to our habits, to our tastes, to our idle and useless lives, to our worldly relationships, to our vanities, and to our faults! and thus nothing is reformed in our life, because we wish to establish a kind of medium state between God and the world, if it were possible.

Where is the flaw in this spiritual disposition, which is not actually a renegation of holy things, but is an imperfect, dangerous, and lukewarm state? It is as follows; it is that all interior warfare against self has ceased, it is that even prayer is cowardly, undeserving of being answered, full of treason against God. And how comes this? Ah! my children, it comes because we must suffer if we wish to be in the right way, in order, at peace, it means that we must fight against ourselves and must work. Surely our souls are a ground which ought to bring forth fine fruits. We must be determined; above all we must pray against our habits, our pride, our impatience, our haughtiness, our hard-heartedness, against our repugnances, frivolity, and love of ease. We must say: "My God, I wish to overcome my inclinations, my worldly tastes; it shall not

be to them that I submit myself, but to Thee alone!" I repeat, the secret of this grievous condition is, that you do not pray sufficiently against self, that you do not learn courageously how to know and reform yourselves.

From this disposition, which I said *might* be applicable to some of you, I will turn to the one which appears to be truly yours, and very happy it makes me to think that it is so.

A sick person wishes to be cured; he is told, "You must have your leg cut off." "Very well! cut it off." "Your arm must be taken off." "Take it off." "Your eye must be plucked out." "Pluck it out." "But you will suffer." "So be it, I am ready to suffer, since God wills it." This is far different to the other invalid who desired to be cured and was told: "If you wish to be cured, your arm must be cut off," and who made answer: "I refuse to have it done." "Well! then I will not touch you, but then you will die." "No, I wish to live." My children, you are not called upon to lose an arm, but what you have to part with are some of your inclinations and wishes. Is it impossible? What does God ask of you? Nothing extraordinary. Only that you shall no longer live solely according to the dictates of nature and fleshly impulse, but that you shall take the light of faith as the guide of your life—here is the secret of the true doctrine. God demands that you conform

thereunto your habits, your tastes, your manner of living, your relationships, your conversations. You will not succeed at first, there will be much seeking, much fighting, much to add and to retrench. You will be ever recommencing, but you will succeed at last. And how? By praying, and by praying with courage against yourself, against your faults, against the radical principles of your faults, against all that is opposed within you, to the Gospel and to the grace of God.

"My God, Thy Will be done! I know what is wanting in me, I have learnt to know my character and my faults, I have probed the wounds of my heart and the needs of my soul. There is much to be done, vast ruins to be restored; but I will persevere! but not in mine own strength. Oh, God! to-morrow, the next day, and the next, I shall find in myself the same tastes, the same frivolities, the same occasions of sin, the same blindness, but I will redouble my prayers, I will pray with more and more fervour and confidence, and whatever be the obstacle, howsoever nature may chafe and rebel, I will pray till the barrier falls, till the obstacle be surmounted, till nature be brought into subjection."

Here is a good prayer! here is a generous resolve! I do not ask you to say, "I will be a saint: I will practise every virtue: I will be humble, patient, pious, and devoted: I will serve God." I do not ask you to repeat these words, but I tell you to pray! Do not even think

over your difficulties; only pray, with a profound sentiment of your own weakness and incapacity. Pray, whilst saying to God, "I do not know, I cannot, I know not how to resolve; but I pray to Thee to learn, to know, to think, to will, and to do, to seize hold of grace, and unite myself to grace triumphant!"

My children, do you not understand what it is to pray against yourselves? Do you not know the merit of this prayer in opposition to the workings of nature? Do you think that the Saviour is not able to gain this victory in your hearts? Do you think, that in dispositions similar to yours, and more dangerous than yours; after greater faults than yours, there have never taken place those wonderful outpourings of Divine grace, which have suddenly transformed what was a chosen vessel of perdition, into a chosen vessel of God's elect?

Yes, and such examples are not rare: there are lost souls such as these, out of whom God draws new glory, pure and beautiful.

What happened to work this miracle? One day grace descended into a soul; perhaps it was in the course of a spiritual retreat; and grace, taking possession of this soul, destroyed the whole edifice of lies and illusions: the walls crumbled, the soul saw, in all its nakedness, the wilderness in which it had lived, the dearth of good works, the unhappiness which had traversed its existence; and turning towards God, prayed in confidence; asked of

Him that which seemed impossible; determined to do that which appeared unfeasible; hoped and dared: and the work was done!

Let us enter, my children, into the sentiments of this generosity which refuses nothing, and by that means, receives all. Let it be your final resolution, to refuse nothing to the Lord. Do not reason, do not calculate, do not analyse; only pray! Whatever difficulties rise up in your path, pray, solicit, importune the Lord. This evening, my children, let your last prayer, the last words which you address to the Heart of Jesus, by the Immaculate Mary, be this earnest supplication: "Lord, give me to do that which costs me dearest, and that which is most pleasing unto Thee."

SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE.

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER.

WE began this retreat, my children, by recalling to mind, how needful it is to be ever soliciting the grace of God; and we have firmly convinced ourselves that those exercises in retreat, which unite reflection with prayer, are the best means of obtaining the benediction of heaven.

I have been thinking what will be the best conclusion I can give you, to confirm you in the holy resolutions you have made, and truly I have ever found but the one thing: I must again speak to you of prayer, I must again invite you more pressingly than ever to attach your hearts to prayer, and to make it the continual occupation of your life. This is the eve of the month of Mary, for which we are all preparing, you especially, her privileged children; and you are well aware that the prayer, powerful above all others, sweeter than any, that to which we ought to attach ourselves by preference, is the petition which passes through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Well, then! under her auspices, and under the auspices of St. Joseph, whose patronage we are now celebrating, I will repeat yet once more to-day, that you must find in prayer, your refuge, the exercise of your virtue, your help in trial and warfare.

Your refuge indeed; for oh! my children, your sorrows and trials are far from being ended. The exercise of virtue; because God has willed that in prayer shall consist its best practice. Finally, help in struggles and combats; because you will always meet with obstacles to conquer, enemies to fight against and to overcome.

Once again, oh Mary, help us! teach us to love prayer, to find in it our strength and our life!

Yes, we must indeed pray, for we are as the frail ship exposed to stormy wind and tempests; and under this touching metaphor, our Saviour taught us a grave lesson. You know that after His labours amongst men, He withdrew, as was His wont, to the mountains, to pass the night in prayer. He orders His disciples to cross over to the opposite coast, and they embark, when suddenly the wind rises, the angry waves roar, and these poor disciples, who were not yet armed with the courage brought by the Holy Ghost, began to tremble and to fear. Nevertheless, the Divine Saviour was tenderly watching over them, and as their alarm increased, He drew near unto them, saying: "Be not afraid: it is I." At first, they are fearful, taking Him for a spirit; but He repeats,

"It is I; fear ye not." Then Peter, springing from the boat, endeavoured to walk upon the waters and meet Jesus, but not having sufficient faith, he began to sink, when Jesus stretched forth His Hand to save him, saying: "Oh! thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" and taking Peter by the hand, He led him into the boat, and immediately the wind ceased, and tranquillity was restored.

Thus is it, my children, with prayer. Poor wanderers as we are upon the troubled waters of the world, we obtain by prayer the help of this saving arm, which alone can rescue us from shipwreck. You will find yet in store many a cross and many a pang. I would I could promise you, that after these days we have spent together, so fertile in graces and blessings, you should never meet with grief, suffering, or trial. But alas! I cannot, I dare not do otherwise than show you the Cross which the Saviour has placed in the world, where He wished that it should reign, and where, whether you accept it willingly or not, you must encounter and bear it.

Blessed are they who know how to carry the cross! blessed are they who know how to take refuge by prayer in the Heart of Jesus and there find peace. Alas! where can we turn without meeting with sorrow! We find it in the most legitimate objects of our affections, in their losses and their sufferings; sorrows in family interests, sorrows in injustices, sorrows in the multiplication of de-

ceptions, sorrows even in works of zeal and of charity. We must suffer!

It is written that Christ had to suffer before He entered into His glory; it is then the universal law, and under no pretext whatsoever can we elude it. But however violent the storm, however heavy our burden, let us remember that in invoking the name of the Lord, in throwing ourselves upon the maternal bosom of Mary, we shall ever find a sure refuge, a safe asylum.

Blessed is the soul which knows how to convert afflictions, trials, sufferings of mind and heart into prayers addressed to God through the immaculate heart of Mary! My children, you will have to suffer, you will have many a sorrow, you will find the same trials awaiting you when you leave this retreat. You are about to return to your homes, where without doubt you will find much for which to thank the Lord, but where also, by the conditions of your fleeting life here below, you are sure to meet with contradiction and trial. Well then, I venture to promise you, that by praying in faith, by pronouncing the name of Mary, by never suffering that blessed name to quit your lips until the tumult of your heart be pacified, you will enjoy many happy hours wherever you may go, and also indescribable consolations in your time of trial. You will suffer, but it will be the pain of Calvary, a resigned and fruitful woe! Jesus is the Man of Sorrows, as Mary is the Mother of Sorrows; we suffer with Him, with her;

addressing ourselves to the Divine Saviour through His Mother, until we find peace even amidst our trials. And how can you doubt but that the compassionate Heart of the Saviour, when entreated by His Mother, will console you, help you, and succour you? I should esteem myself very happy, my children, and should consider that I had accomplished a great deal, if on leaving this retreat you were fully convinced that prayer is the best and only consolation of the soul. Without a doubt you may, as the Saviour did in the Garden of Gethsemane, seek consolation in Christian friendship, for you know that religion never forbids you to pour out your troubles and your griefs into the heart of a sympathizing friend: but above all, my children, first of all, carry your anxieties and your woes to the heart of your Mother Mary. Remember that the Saviour never tries you, but that He may bless you; remember that from the heights of heaven His unsleeping Providence and divine mercy are ever watching over you, and not one hair falls from your head unseen.

You understand now the meaning of these reverses, these illnesses, these untoward events which afflict you. God disposes thus of you, God knows, it is God's Will. Pray then; reason no longer; pray to Mary: "Oh! Mother of Jesus, I suffer, I know not what to think or to believe. Earth has no refuge, no surety for me! May your heart be my shelter." And then continue, persevere. There are few tranquil souls, because there are so few souls who pray.

Are you not Christians then, my children? Let prayer henceforth be the support of your earthly pilgrimage. Persevere, and believe me, that when you shall have gained this filial constancy, this courageous fidelity of turning towards prayer as your sole support and refuge, God will come to your assistance, He has promised to do so. He does not grant every request, and I may add, that His infallible promises, those in which He never fails, regard only the graces necessary to our salvation, the graces which will give us spiritual strength and sustain our fainting hearts. Ah! yes, pray indeed for the conversion of a cherished soul, for the restoration to health of some loved one, for the aversion of some pressing danger menacing those dear to you, without a doubt, pray! these are lawful objects of your supplications, but at the same time, learn to wait, and if it be that you sometimes see the Hand of God waxing heavier and heavier, do not fear, but look up on high; God's Will is good, is wiser than you can imagine.

Take courage! Take courage in faith especially. Faith alone preserves souls in the right path; she alone has the secret of true consolation!

In the second place, I have told you that the prayer addressed to God in filial confidence is the best exercise of virtue. Doubtless you must keep His commandments, but when it comes to the practice of holy virtues to which you aspire, if you remain alone with your own

thoughts and your own efforts, how much shall you accomplish? nothing. You must have the grace of God, which is as the sun and the dew, without which all the labourer's toil would be in vain.

Prayer cultivates the field of your soul, because by prayer the grace of God renders fruitful the seed of your life. You must refer your life, and every action of your life to God. You must feel the necessity of ever tending to your ultimate and supreme end. You have learnt in these hours of recollection that your whole existence must be conformed to God, the only good. Say then, from the depths of your heart: "My Lord, I seek Thee, I long for Thee, may I find Thee at last!" and God makes answer: "My child, pray, pray without ceasing. I will open to you, but you must knock and must seek, and then you shall find."

Here, my children, is the holy lesson of prayer, here is our invitation from the Divine Heart. God knows how to draw you to Himself, by your needs and by your desires. You wish to be good, to attain peace, purity and all virtues; you seek them, and perhaps you make too many efforts in their research; but have you prayed fervently, have you ardently solicited the Heart of God, that He may amend all that is faulty in you? You are discouraged, you are uneasy, you say to yourself: "No! I shall never make any progress: I shall always remain where I am." You deceive yourself, pray and never lose

heart! If the hour of the Lord has not yet arrived, learn to wait. This hour has come, the moment you feel your unworthiness. Grace is already mighty within you when, with patience and faith despite all your falls, you say, "Never mind, I will pray, I will ask God for His strength, I will invoke the aid of my Mother. Oh Mary! grant me the only boon to which I aspire." The Apostles have repeated, after their Divine Master, that we must pray without ceasing. Everything lies in this. A life, whose ruling habit is prayer, obtains every grace. This continued prayer is the best and most faithful exercise of the virtues of patience, faith, hope and charity. Live then upon prayer; let us be always praying. Prayer is, I repeat, our refuge, the exercise of every virtue, is finally, our strength in trial and help in warfare.

Perhaps, my children, my words are somewhat grave and sad for the last of our conferences together. Nevertheless, were I to tell you that from henceforth all struggle is over, that henceforth you will advance in the way of perfection, that henceforth you will meet with no difficulties in doing your duty, if I told you this, my children, I should assuredly be deceiving you. On the contrary, every day brings its share of pain, and as long as we bear on earth the grievous burden of our bodies, so long we must find means to conquer. Fight we must, and nevertheless our weakness is extreme; even though you often bemoan this, my children, you do not yet understand

the vastness of this truth. Of yourselves, you are absolutely incapable, absolutely powerless to merit heaven and to accomplish the work of salvation. The enemy returns with his snares, the world with its dissipations, the heart with its frailties, the senses with their seductions, old habits regain their sway, the battle is ever re-commencing! But how is it, my God, Thou hast given us prayer, and yet we know not how to fight? Shall we fear still? Shall we not hope for victory over our infirmities, when Thou hast given us permission to pray always, when Thou hast promised ever to listen to our prayers? Thou saidst to the disciples, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you; I will be with you until the end of time." Oh! my God, Thou art indeed with the faithful soul, until life is consummated!

No, no, let us have no more fears, Christian souls; and armed, as says St. Paul, with the buckler of faith, our loins girt with truth and justice, we may say, leaning upon the grace of the Lord, that we shall overcome at last!

Christian souls, cast off all your languor, your tepidity, banish these thoughts which disquiet you; I do not say they will not return, but pray, and ask the Lord to do for you what you cannot do for yourselves. Inspired by faith, animated by love, this prayer must needs be granted.

Courage then, let not your souls faint by the way! Oh! my children, what a blessed influence is yours to exercise in the world! what examples may you not give

to souls far removed from their Lord, whom you will rejoin to-morrow in your luxurious *salons!* They are not here, but you are about to return to them, to those languishing, frivolous, vain, and misled ones! Misled, alas! by the very same idle pleasures from which you, happily, are detached. My children, you can speak to them a Christian language, accompanied by a compassionating tenderness, and cause them gently to understand that they know neither true peace nor true happiness. There is much good you may do them, much that you will do, and God, Who will bless your good efforts in these souls, will reserve abundant reward for yourselves. Only pray, and be not discouraged! Whatever happens, once more I bid you pray!

I will leave you with these words, my children. I thank the Lord for these days of recollection, of prayers and of blessing. Yes, indeed it is a comforting sight to the minister of Jesus Christ to meet with hearts that are softened, fervent, and devoted, seeking with a generous determination to find all that shall draw them closer to their God. Ah! my dear children, be faithful, be happy and blessed in the practice of faith! be watchful over yourselves, and never forget the lessons you have learnt in these happy hours. Remember that one day you received the gift of God, that you knew it, tasted it at the foot of the holy Tabernacle. Words fade away, man dies, but truth abides evermore. Go on then, in confi-

dence, my children; recollect, above all, what a firm support you possess in the prayer offered up to the Heart of Jesus through Mary the Immaculate, a help of which neither sufferings nor temptations can ever rob you. Yes, I bless my God with deep thankfulness, I invoke His benediction upon you, and upon your families! These days full of consolation will not be lost upon my soul; let me tell you in all simplicity, that they have done me good! Let us all united together here, united in faith, believe that this pious association, which gives us power to serve our God better on earth, is a pledge of felicity and happiness to come, a spectacle pleasing to God, and which rejoices the angels, and prepares for ourselves an eternal crown above.

SECOND SERIES.

FIRST CONFERENCE.

GOOD FRIDAY.

ON holy and solemn days, such as these, when God wishes to single out a soul as the receptacle of special graces, He plunges it in a profound spirit of recollection, and penetrates it with a vivid realization of the sufferings of the Saviour. This soul, identified with Him, prays as He prays, sighs and weeps with Him, immolates itself and dies with Him. When I see you all gathered around me, at this solemn hour, marked to all eternity by the death of our Lord Himself, I supplicate my God and yours to grant us this grace of profound recollection, of a close union with His Heart.

At a moment such as this, where must we seek our consolation and our refuge? In Calvary, in the Cross, in tortures and ignominies, in death, and there only!

. . . . There is no consolation outside these sorrows, no support save in these strange infirmities.

Ask from the depths of your heart, at the foot of the Cross, that you may understand, if it be possible, according to the words of St. Paul, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of these mysteries of love. Amongst all the different points of view which we may take in reflecting upon this mystery, which is so often the subject of your prolonged meditations, there is one which we may study together, which is Christ's liberty of suffering. You know that it is written, that He suffered and sacrificed Himself of His own free will. He prophesied to the Jews many of the different phases of His Passion; it depended on His own will to lay down His life and to take it again, as He told His disciples, when rejecting their offers of vain defence, "Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and He will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scriptures be accomplished?" Jesus Christ is free, He commands suffering to come to Him, He rules over His own anguish; there was not one torture, not one addition to His agony to which He had not given His orders. All that He felt, all that He endured, was by His own power, His own will, His own command. Nothing lacerated His Heart, nothing convulsed His breast, nothing agonised His Divine Humanity, but by His own will, His own ordaining. Understand that in that amazing spec-

tacle of the Passion of a God, it is by His holy Will, by His Divine Providence, that all was accomplished, ordained, and prescribed, and under the empire of this truth, we must endeavour to fathom these wondrous mysteries. I will present to you in three words the triple agony of the Saviour; the agony of His prayer, of His love for His people, of His zeal for the glory of His Father.

The agony of His prayer! Watch Him as He crosses the torrent, ascends to the summit of the Mount of Olives, of this mountain, whence He had so often discoursed to His disciples, just because it was there He would have to suffer; and here, giving His final orders to suffering, He calls down upon Himself every species of pain, of grief, and of anguish! You see, as it were, a slave condemned by the power which oppresses Him, crushed under an iron yoke, in the dead of the night, alone, forsaken, prostrated with His face on the ground. "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me!" Thrice He repeats this prayer, a bloody sweat oozes forth from every pore of His skin, His groans are indescribable. It is no slave, it is He who wills, who commands. He bade night come, and the darkness and gloom overwhelmed Him; He bade mortal heaviness weigh upon Him, and it bowed Him to the dust; He is crushed under an intolerable burden which He Himself creates, under an exceeding sickening of soul, under every bitter disgust and repugnance, aching of heart, and woe unspeakable:

sadness covers Him as with a funeral pall, His soul is consumed in bitterness and anguish.

"My soul is sorrowful even unto death," and it is His own command which does all this! He is King, He is free, He chooses to suffer to the uttermost. . . . . And this is not all: in His sacred Humanity substantially united to His Divinity, He possesses all the joys of heaven; but by a miracle, He refuses to be strengthened, to be comforted; He forbids consolation to approach Him, and augments the exquisite sensibility of His human nature, in order that He may suffer the more. It is Jesus Christ, the Creator of the World, the Lord of heaven and earth who thus commands. Oh! my Saviour, this then is the exercise of the might, of the liberty, of the will which has redeemed the world! an agony of prayer! . . . . As a valiant captain, who, withdrawn to the summit of the fortress which he has conquered, feigns to abandon the place to pillage, in order the better to subdue the enemy, so the Saviour is Master. He draws down upon Himself every pain and woe, His sacred Humanity is crushed under the weight of sacrifice, He clothes Himself with our weakness. Three times He seeks His apostles, seeking for consolation, and they are asleep: "What," says He to them, "could you not watch with Me one hour?" On His return, He endures another humiliation, an angel comes to comfort Him . . . and He does not disdain to accept this support; it was

not that He should suffer less, but that He might have one humiliation the more, one pain the more. . . . He, the King, the Lord of the angels! Ah! have we thought of it? And you, when you experience dryness and disgust in your prayers, in your interior life, when you feel the sorrows and trials that the supernatural life multiplies under your footsteps, when duty seems too hard and too heavy to be borne, how well you know how to bemoan yourselves and to reject suffering! At times, you fancy yourselves abandoned in prayer; you can always complain to God who thus forsakes you, and nevertheless you should say: "Holy hour! blessed moment of languor and sadness! blessed trial which is purifying my soul!" Ah! in the secret places of these hearts which God draws near to Himself, to His Passion, to His virtues, there abides something more than patience and resignation under suffering and trial, there is the consolation of suffering with Jesus and like Jesus. Let us conquer our weakness; and if God gives us a share of sadness and disgust, we must have patience, we must await the rising of the dawn after the long night of trial, the calm after the storm, and pray to Jesus, to will as He has willed. Then we shall experience no excess of bitterness, although from time to time sorrow and tribulation will overwhelm the soul, when we must acknowledge the hand of God, chastising His child only because He loves it so tenderly.

The agony of His prayer! and the agony of His love! Jesus Christ was of the tribe of Juda, of the house of David; in the eternal designs of Almighty God He was sent, first of all, to the wandering sheep of Israel. He loves them: every day during His career, He gives them the most touching proofs of His goodness! How He bears with their importunities! How He goes before them to teach them, to speak to them of the kingdom of God! How He raises their hopes by elevating their thoughts from the coarse things of earth, to those of heaven! What return did He receive, or rather what did He wish to receive? He loves this people, He proves His love in the most touching manner, one thinks that all hearts would have rushed after His footsteps. Doubtless the Lord never creates the evil that we are free to commit; nevertheless, we may say with truth that God makes use of the sins of men, and of their guilty thoughts to accomplish His designs. Of His own free will, in the hour of His martyrdom, Jesus Christ invokes upon Himself every kind of suffering and trial. He ordained that in return for His love He should receive hatred and outrage; He chose hatred, because He desired to suffer; He chose outrage, so that His suffering should be increased; and He suffered because it was His Will, and was delivered over to the rage of His enemies because He willed it. He was treated as a blasphemer and seducer, He was betrayed, and He chose that all these

injuries should reach Him. . . . He loved the Jews, and in return for His love and tenderness, He chose to receive at their hands outrage and ingratitude, because He loved suffering. He spent His life in doing good, He was prodigal of miracles and kindnesses, in order to nourish the hungry multitude, He multiplied the bread which sustains the body, whilst giving them at the same time the Word of Life; and the same people, who in their enthusiasm desired to make Him king, in the hour of His Passion deserted Him; the memory of His good deeds faded away, He received naught but insult, hatred, and contempt. . . . Ah! and you, who are so susceptible, so easy to wound, who are you? Poor pitiful creatures, you must have homage and gratitude, even for what you have not done! Look at your example, a prey to outrage, hatred, and ingratitude! Go on murmuring! Listen to the complaints of your self-love, seek the gratification of your desires. . . . This God, Whom angels adore, Who has created the world, Who has crowned with His favours everything that has breath, He never tasted one single pleasure. . . . His love was agony! . . Jesus Christ cured all infirmities of both mind and body. . . . He said to a guilty woman, "Neither will I condemn thee, go and now sin no more." They brought unto Him the sick, and He caused their infirmities to disappear; those possessed with evil spirits, and He delivered them; the dead, and He raised them to life; to

all He gave happiness and peace: and He, He chose every agony, every torture, nothing else for His Heart, for His Body, for His Soul.

And again, as a recompense for the good that He did, watch Him from that night of agony in the Garden of Olives; see Him taken captive, then scourged, crowned with thorns, covered with wounds . . . . upon His lacerated shoulders He is made to carry a long, heavy cross, the instrument of His own martyrdom; see Him as He hangs between heaven and earth in all the tortures of an agony that continues for three hours. And this was His choice. . . . In this humanity united to the Word, He works a miracle in order to give fuller vent to suffering, His pains and woe are multiplied to the uttermost, His soul is steeped in bitterness, and you, what do you know of suffering? Ah! when affliction visits you, how loud are your sighs! Look at the Saviour in His Passion, see how He suffers! He commands pain to approach Him, and pain obeys; He desires the extremity of anguish. . . . Go on murmuring then, seek your ease, flatter your self-love, fly with horror from all suffering, take care of your bodies so that not an ache or a pain shall come near them; spare yourselves, indulge yourselves, pamper your delicacy, seek after pleasure—but you cannot escape the chastisement of sin; the happiness of heaven is for those only who have known how to suffer here below. . . . Oh! agony of my Saviour! Oh! Sacred Heart, Who didst chose bit-

terness and anguish! teach me to suffer, to welcome pain, to endure grief, to devote myself to work and to hardship, to sacrifice myself, to immolate myself for Thee!

These days are fertile in lessons, and you should recall to mind that question indicated in your book of exercises, which we must ask ourselves when meditating on the Passion, for it signifies many things: "What is it that the Saviour desires? Suffering." You may well ask yourselves this other question: "What do I wish to suffer?" Now let us examine into this agony of His zeal for the glory of God. Here we must abase and annihilate ourselves, for this is the mystery of mysteries! an unheard of, a dreadful mystery, but one which to trusting souls and faithful hearts, ought to be a motive the more for love of suffering. You are well aware that Jesus Christ came to make reparation to the glory of His Father, He has often told us so. In the appointed hour of His Passion, when He had fulfilled the mission given Him by His Father, when He had endured all His life long, grief and pain, insults and ignominy, in reparation to the outraged Majesty of God, assuredly nothing could still be wanting to the dignity of His sacrifice, for time immemorial, for generations past and to come. And yet, by an incomprehensible design of God, by this Divine Will, which respects in us the freedom which He has given us, it was necessary that Jesus Christ, before the

consummation of His sacrifice, should accept its inutility. . . . It was necessary that He should foresee, until the end of time, the outraged glory of His Father, the unfruitfulness of His reparation, His blood shed to no avail. . . . He foresaw the assembled nations, He contemplated this innumerable multitude of souls, turning away from the love of their God, condemning themselves to perdition by their scorn of Him and of His Cross. . . . And in spite of all this, He dies to save souls, to avenge the Majesty of His Father. He accepts all these outrages, He sees His blood trodden under foot, and from the Cross, in the last terrible embraces of His agony, of His unutterable woe, He utters these words, "All is consummated!"

Whilst He knows that His sacrifice is applicable to all souls, He knows also that millions will have rejected His mercy. . . . He is their Father, their Saviour! As a good Pastor, He goes in search of them, and these souls respond to His love by blasphemy and derision. He accepts this pain, He accepts the sterility of His sacrifice. Ah! my God, my Saviour, of all Thy sufferings, this is the most cruel! Thou hast done all for these souls, abandoned all, endured all, sacrificed all to pay their ransom, and yet these souls have rejected Thee! they have gone in search of carnal pleasures, of guilty joys; this has rendered Thy Cross even more bitter! Thou hast expired with this thought in Thine Heart: there is

an innumerable multitude of souls who will never profit by this immolation. . . . Here is the agony of zeal, here is why, from the heights of Calvary, Jesus cries, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me! . . . I thirst! . . . Father, forgive them!" We can understand what were the feelings with which the Heart of Jesus was filled; He suffered for souls. And Mary, and Magdalen, and St. John, and all those holy women round about His Cross unite themselves with His woe, with the deep waters of bitterness which cover His Soul.

And now we must turn to the consolatory side of the Cross. . . . After a tempestuous night, after a violent storm, how lovingly does the poor mariner hail the peace and rest of a calm, beautiful morn! There, on Calvary, amidst tears and lamentations, yes! my Jesus, Thou hast thought of the faithful souls who love Thee; Thou hast counted with satisfaction those hearts who fear not the horrors, the ignominy of Thy Cross! Thou hast rested Thine eyes, beaming with peace, upon those souls vowed to perfection, who, following the example of Thy Sacred Heart, will hesitate before no pain, will strive after every virtue in order to please Thee. . . . Blessed be Thou, oh Lord! Who with Thy blood shed upon the Cross, hast inspired us with the grace of a holy vocation. And to you all, who are called upon to associate yourselves in a special manner with the Cross of Jesus and the anguish of His Heart, I venture to say in this

hour, amongst these recollections so sorrowful, so heart-rending, that you are amongst those of His friends who stood at the foot of the Cross ! that you unite with them in consoling your God. Ah ! more than ever, recollect that you are bound to gratitude, to love, and to reparation. Do not shrink from sacrifice, every hour brings its cross ; be generous in suffering and in sacrificing yourselves, never refuse your God what He asks of you. . . . This is the hour in which He expired upon the Cross, this is the hour in which the Church invites you to think of the agony of His love, this is the hour in which you should offer Him your most generous and devoted homage. Oh ! Mary ! oh ! Mother of Sorrows ! at the foot of the Cross, Thou hast received the title of our Mother, we are all the children of Thy dolours, children of Calvary. . . . May we never be unfaithful to our origin. Pray for us that our hearts may be securely united to the Cross, and to the Passion of Jesus Christ, and even as thy Son has died for us, teach us, oh ! Mother of suffering, never to shrink from the sufferings and the trials of the Cross. Time passes, hours roll on with a fearful rapidity, Calvary is ever present to warn us of the solemn moment which shall consummate our sacrifice. Mary, refuge of sinners, help us, protect us, enable us to suffer patiently in this life, so as to hope in death, and to receive an everlasting crown in eternity !

SECOND CONFERENCE.

COURAGE IN PRAYER.

FTER many years of reflection and experience in the exercise of the sacred ministry ; after having known many souls, I feel the necessity of saying and of repeating, especially to fervent souls, that what is needful above all things, what is absolutely essential in the habitual daily course of our lives, is courage in prayer. What is our Saviour's occupation throughout His Passion, beginning with a bitter agony? After having wept, sweated blood, and voluntarily endured the full measure of every repugnance, of every anguish, of every horror ; what does He do?

He prays thrice : then rising, He goes to His Apostles and says to them, "Rise, let us go : behold he is at hand that will betray me." Admirable words ! noble expression of the strength that He had derived in prayer and in the interior sacrifice of Himself which He had made to His Father ! Let us follow Him through the remaining circumstances of His bitter Passion, to the tribunal

of Caiphas, to Pilate's prætorium, until He ascends the hill of Calvary, and let us see how He expresses Himself as to the interior state of His Soul, how He appears to wrestle and to strive as He conquers the triumph of His sacrifice. All is by prayer. And you, my children, who perhaps in your past life have experienced many a deception, committed many a fault, traversed many a varied phase, interrogate your memories, sound your consciences: when you have been crushed under the weight of a heavy burden, when you have been overcome by temptation, did you pray fervently? When God permits us to be tried or tempted, we fret and torment ourselves, and then after these useless preoccupations, we too often fall into a state of lassitude which gives us no comfort, but creates, as it were, a compact between our soul and the devil, whence come trouble, anxiety and discouragement. Oh! I conjure you let this warning be a lesson for your whole life. Never forget that the great obstacle to sanctification, the barrier to spiritual progress, is that we cling to our own views and our own reasonings, we lose ourselves in our glorification of self, we wish to find our own reason for everything, forgetting that God has placed us on earth to live by faith, to aim at a supernatural end, and that we must pray always and never grow weary.

In what part of the Gospel are we commanded to reason, to reflect, to dispute? On the contrary, does not every page enunciate the precept of prayer under every

form? Our Lord says to us, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." And after the parable of the friend who goeth by night to the house of another and constrains him by his obstinate importunity to rise and give him what he requests, what does our Saviour add: "Go, and do thou in like manner." And again St. Paul: "Pray without ceasing." It is a very simple thing to pray, and yet nevertheless, it seems very difficult and very rarely done.

Give me the most imperfect of souls, that one most ravaged by passions, storms, and temptations of all kinds; and if this soul, whatever happens, knows how to pour out to God its reasonings, its thoughts, troubles, anguish of heart, and temptations, knows how to pour them into the Bosom of His Paternal Mercy and to find its refuge in prayer: then I say that that soul is possessed of great virtues, it is saved and its place in heaven is already appointed. The whole secret of peace of heart and of spiritual progress—all that is good, all that is virtuous, lies in this holy courage in prayer! I say courage, because I know what it costs to embrace this abnegation, this absolute renunciation of self; here is our interior cross, but a cross to which is united every virtue, for in prayer are to be found patience, mortification, zeal, strength, warfare, victory and peace. . . . . If it were not so, if there were any better means, our Saviour when

consummating His sacrifice upon Calvary, for the expiation of our hardness of heart, in order that we might gain every grace and that the world might be saved, would assuredly have commanded and taught it to us. On the other hand, what does He? He prostrates Himself with His face to the ground, praying . . . for you who will not pray for yourselves. . . . . And "being in an agony, He prayed the longer," says the Evangelist.

St. Ignatius remarks that in consolation, perseverance in prayer is easy; but in desolation, he adds, prolong your prayer; it is your Garden of Olives, humble yourself, persevere as did Our Lord. You are sad, discouraged, agitated, troubled, you are ignorant of the cause; what do you intend to do; reason, dispute? No, fly to prayer, prostrate yourself; pray though it be with dryness, with disgust; pray, against yourself, in spite of yourself, even when you feel a horror, a hatred of prayer, if such a sentiment be possible. . . . Pray; you have no excuse for forsaking this holy exercise; our Saviour desired to experience distaste, loathing and repugnance, thus when reduced to an agony, He prolonged His prayer. "But," you will say, "I cannot keep myself recollected, I am overwhelmed with distractions;" precisely on this account you must pray; you have need of a refuge, a support, and where will you seek them? In your own thoughts and arguments? . . . But they are the source whence spring all your weaknesses, all miseries, all faults! Oh! I conjure you,

pray! Do not leave this chapel to-day, without having formed the energetic determination to find, ever and always, whatever happens, the courage of prayer. Oh! I assure you, you will not often have renewed this sacrifice, this meritorious courage of prayer, before the hardships, temptations and storms will diminish in force, and you will find yourself penetrated with the sentiment of peace and superiority which grace bestows.

Pray how you like, but think of Our Lord and of His mysteries, think above all of Mary. The human heart, here below, has, hidden in its folds, and in every situation in life, strange sufferings; I have met with souls, who, brought to the very verge of despair by sorrows, woes, sins of conscience, and cruel disillusions, have one day raised themselves up by an effort of grace, and armed with courage have abandoned themselves, thrown themselves into the arms of prayer, pronouncing the single word Mary, a thousand and a thousand times, during hours together; by this blessed name the retreat from temptation became sensible and palpable, it was as though they could see the devil fleeing away; their very footsteps might have been counted by the number of these invocations.

You are fearful of not fulfilling the duties of your position of not following the path God has marked out for you; the remembrance of your faults discourages you . . . Leave all that alone, trust in God! Pray . . . and

recollect during the whole of your life, that whatever happens, whatever sin, whatever weakness you may have to reproach yourself with, there is no ill without a remedy in God's sight.

He is the All-Powerful, the infallible Physician, but He has laid one condition upon His aid: this condition is prayer. Ask Him that of which you have need, pray as you like, but persevere, never stop . . . Begin with your waking moments, continue throughout the day, in the midst of your occupations the most numerous and the most varied; pray as you go hither and thither, as you fulfil your social obligations . . . everywhere. Pray in the night if you should wake, pray always, and then, patience . . . One thing certain in this life, is that we must fight and conquer ourselves; and fight the more and conquer ourselves the better when obstacles re-appear and abound.

But if, in order to oppose the enemies of your salvation, if to gain the victory, you trust in yourself, in your own opinions, your own thoughts, your own decisions, and your own anxiety, you will accomplish nothing. You must triumph over yourself, in such and such a circumstance, in order to accept a contrariety, to encounter a surprise, to fulfil a duty, in opposition to your inclinations and tastes, to surmount your own nature which rebels against the idea of sacrifice. How is this to be done? By prayer, which is the fire which melts the iron, the crucible which gives to the gold all its brilliancy and all its value. If

sometimes you feel to have more force; if, for example, during a retreat, you feel more determined, more courageous, it is simply that you pray better, that you are more recollected, that you have sought God oftener. If you ask me, how you are to improve and to advance, I have only one answer, and that is the deep inward conviction of my whole life! pray! . . . In temptations, of which we find every kind, often cruel, violent and protracted, if instead of questioning, weeping, and bemoaning yourself, you have recourse boldly to prayer, forgetful of self, the temptations will soon be conquered, they will vanish and disappear, fulfilling the promise made by Our Lord; "Ask, and you shall receive."

We shall not always obtain the graces which we solicit; they may not be in the order nor for the good of our soul or welfare, nevertheless the promise is distinct, infallible, and this is how we must apply it: when we ask that we may not yield to our weakness, to discouragement, when we ask to overcome the repugnances of nature, its infirmities and revolts, we may rest assured that God will grant our requests, for remember that to say, in what concerns your duties, "*I cannot*," is *a lie, a heresy;* God commands, and He will give you strength and grace, if you ask, if you pray for them. The Council of Trent, the infallible organ of the Church of Jesus Christ inspired by the Holy Ghost Himself, has said, and in so saying, it does but repeat the words of St.

Augustine to which it has added the force of its authority, "Do all that you can, and ask for that which you cannot do;" for of oneself one can do nothing solid, but God comes to our help, so that we may accomplish all things. It is not of faith that you possess the grace for the action you are to perform, but it is of faith, that you can ask for what is wanting to you. Pray then to learn how to pray, and say to our Saviour, as did His Apostles, "Lord, teach me to pray." It is the grace of all graces, and there is none other which He desires more ardently to grant us; besides which, He owes it us; by virtue of His own promise, by virtue of that infallible oracle of His Church which we quoted just now. If you ask for it, He will give it you.

Nature rebels, because at certain moments, she has a horror of prayer; but in order to overcome nature, what do we require more than the example of Jesus Christ? During the thirty years of His hidden life at Nazareth, during the labours of His apostolate, in the Garden of Olives, in His Passion and upon Calvary, when covered with shame and opprobrium, what was the occupation of His Heart? He prayed! A gentle and patient lamb, He prayed to merit for us, the grace and the courage of prayer in the midst of temptations and tribulations.

Take this resolution to-day, at the foot of the Cross of Our Lord, that whatever happens, even should you feel

tempted to abandon all, you will fly to prayer, throw yourself upon your knees and say, "I will not think; I will pray!" In a life of humiliation, of patience, of mortification, of crucifixion and sacrifice, every thing is to be found!

In these thoughts, which I would wish to engrave upon your innermost hearts, I have, I feel sure, expressed your own resolves, the want of your hearts. You will pray then; you will pray in immolating yourselves, you will pray that you may immolate yourselves, you will immolate yourselves by prayer, and thus you will be blessed for ever.

So be it.

THIRD CONFERENCE.

FEAST OF THE PASSION.—THE BLESSINGS TO BE GAINED BY SUFFERING.

ST. PAUL says, that it is because Jesus Christ suffered and was humiliated, that He is exalted and crowned with glory. The prophets in ages before had predicted that His Passion would be the cause of His triumph; we must therefore conclude that the eternal recompenses will be awarded by the Sovereign Judge to suffering and to the Cross! thus also the Apostle said and reiterated that we shall be glorified with Christ, if we have suffered with Him. This is the path you must follow, my children, whatever may be your age or position; you must accomplish this law of suffering and of the Cross. You can understand that if this law was written for our Divine Saviour the Chief of all the predestinated; for the brilliant legion of the elect; for Mary, the Mother of God, the purest and most perfect of creatures, who was raised to the most sublime dignity; we must needs suffer and suffer greatly, that we may enter into the participation of the greatest glory. Therefore let us not

complain when we encounter trial, and a heavy cross imposed by either duty, the work of our sanctification, the practice of virtues, temptations, or obstacles of any kind; no, let us not murmur, let us adore and love this law. Besides, if we love Mary, if we are devoted to her service, it ill becomes us to discover difficulties and hardships, and to murmur against them; they ought the rather to suffice to close our mouth and to turn our eyes towards Calvary!

Nevertheless it is just, that to establish us in this truth, we seek to penetrate the motives which God has for uniting the crown to suffering. The glory of God is there, He has done all for His glory, it is the end of His works, and He cannot act otherwise than for the furtherance of His glory. Well then! that glory is manifested in the highest degree, in a soul which is a prey to grief, and yet is faithful, there it shines in all its splendour before the eyes of men. This soul accepts sacrifice, with its eye fixed upon the Heart of its God, it submits, adores and is resigned; the glory of God is made manifest, for all virtues are resplendent in suffering.

I observe a worldling, surrounded with luxury, pleasures, and enjoyments, his life passing away in the whirl of feastings and joys, and I ask myself: "Where is the glory of my God and the manifestation of His Divine attributes?" In this magnificence, I find rather something which alienates me from God: what, riches and revellings in

this world? of what use are the sacrifices of virtue? His is indeed the language of those maniacs who say: "To-day we will be crowned with roses, and give ourselves up to pleasure, and to-morrow we will die."

What a difference when I meet with a soul bowed down under the weight of infirmities and grief! It advances by painful steps, receiving nothing but contempt, suffering with neither consolations nor support, all apparently is wanting; but alone, recollected in humiliation and in prayer, that soul is alone with God, submits and adores, accepts all at His Hands, blesses the blows they deal, loves this Heart which appears to wound so cruelly. Oh! my God! oh! Saviour of Souls! oh! King of Hearts! Here Thou art indeed! How this soul, by its humble and patient attitude, peaceful in the midst of trials, proclaims that Thou art the joy of joys! how it testifies to having found a treasure amidst its sufferings, a happiness which surpasses all the felicity of which we can dream. By this contemplation of a grief patient in humiliation, resigned at the foot of the Cross, I have risen even unto God: I see a conquest and a triumph, and I cry: "God only is great! God only is holy!" . . . Oh! Mary, Mother of Sorrows, cherished Mother, standing at the foot of the Cross, it is Thou indeed who in this abyss of tears, in this ocean of bitterness, showest us the virtues which find favour with the Lord: and truly dost Thou say to us, Oh! immaculate

Virgin, victim of charity, that we must prefer the Will of God to all else! how thou dost exalt it! . . . And it is precisely in this sea of sorrows and sufferings that God places a soul which He wishes to sanctify and elevate to the attainment of every virtue. In shame and humiliation Mary is silent, she bows her head as if to receive diadems and crowns; in her devotedness she seeks the glory of God alone, and her heart desires sacrifice, that the reign of God may be established upon earth.

I just now said, that virtue is resplendent in suffering. Oh! charity! thou blessed name which includes all that is pleasing to God, which leads to glory and identifies us, in some degree, with God Himself, oh! how radiantly dost thou glisten in time of grief and trial! During joys and consolations, we may love God I admit, but still how rarely does it happen! we love Him for ourselves, for the pleasures which He gives. Again, our Saviour has said, "Blessed are they that mourn!" The soul which suffers, which possesses nothing, which meets here below with naught but bitterness and scorn, what has she to love? She loves God for Himself, she loves Him in her grief, she prefers Him to all else, she loves her cross as Jesus loved His, as Mary preferred her sword beyond everything else; she has a horror of enjoyment and of pleasure, because they take away from her love of God. You perceive that this is heaven begun, you see here what it is that raises

the soul to the regions of heaven, what is the link which unites us upon earth to the Lord, when once this act of surrender and devotion has been pronounced. What is the occupation of the Saints in heaven? They love, and if there is anything they could regret, it would be that they can no longer suffer. . . . There, they abide in the fulness of satisfied love, and believe me, their happiest recollections are of past sufferings!

Count up, if you can, the wounds of the Martyrs, recall to mind their ignominies, contemplate Jesus, the true Model; all are crowned with glory because they suffered! The Sacred Heart of our Divine Saviour, beating in Its Divine humanity, rejoices because He suffered. In His Divine munificence He has ever measured His glory by His sufferings. And we, of what do we complain? . . . Ah! let us no longer listen to our weakness, let us not begin each day by dreading pain, let us not find the path of virtue too thorny a one! What an illusion it is! what a mistake! Do we not know that the road which leads to heaven is one of sacrifice and of the Cross? do we not know that the souls most dearly loved of God, are those which have endured the most? Let us not then complain when He gives us our part of trial and of sacrifice. If each one of our footsteps is marked by self-abnegation and suffering, let us not think of, or look for, other joys than those of heaven. If we voluntarily, in peace and charity, accept our daily

cross, how happy shall we be, what fruits will spring from our sacrifices!

We must imprint these truths fixedly in our hearts and ask Our Lord to give us this love of pain and of the Cross! There is the secret of the saints, there is the place of refuge, refreshment and peace! The Heart of Jesus desired this baptism with impatience which He called His baptism of blood; He indignantly repulsed those who spoke of it with contempt—He *wished* to suffer. . . . Remember always that in the hour of suffering, heaven begins! . . . Let not this day pass without our asking for the love of suffering; it is much to ask, but you may ask for much.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

FEAST OF THE SEVEN DOLOURS OF MARY. ON SACRIFICE.

THIS feast, consecrated to the remembrance of the sorrows of Mary, ought to bring us with her to the foot of the Cross, to Jesus Crucified, as we pronounce from the depths of our hearts the word sacrifice! Sacrifice is a life in this world outside the natural life, it is in some degree a want of Our Lord's. Divinity ever requires a victim, and here is why, since the beginning of the world, at any rate since the Fall, we perceive victims everywhither, blood everywhither.

In the midst of strange errors there is one eternal truth, sacrifice offered to God. By this destruction of life which He Himself had given, by this immolation according to His own orders, we must acknowledge that all is of God, that He is the sole Master, that to Him alone belong glory and power, and that the annihilation of this victim proves our dependence. But all these sacrifices were but as a shadow, a faint image of that which was to be realized. The hour is come, the fulness

of time is accomplished, and the Son of God has become incarnate: He has clothed Himself with a flesh capable of suffering, capable of dying in immolation to God. From the beginning, St. Paul represents Him to us as humbling Himself, offering Himself to His Father, obeying, even from the bosom of Mary, until the death on the Cross. Sacrifice and He are never apart, never, never! . . . during His Divine Infancy, in the peace and silence of Nazareth, never! in the tranquil workshop of St. Joseph, never! in His public life, even unto Calvary, where all is consummated, never!

The Heart of Jesus aspires to sacrifice, It suffers from delay, It is impatient for His hour, and when the Apostles wish to put the thought from Him, He replies, by these severe words: "Go behind me, Satan." How then, said He, shall the Will of my Father be accomplished? Here is sacrifice, here is an example, here is hope, here is life, here is a Christian: an entire immolation, annihilation and sacrifice before God. Do we pretend to dispute the possession of ourselves with God? And Mary! Mary lived for naught else, her life was immolation itself. . . . Ah! into what a sea of tribulation was she plunged from the solemn day on which Simeon foretold her sufferings; the sword pierced her heart never to be removed. . . . But this sword, she loved it; this suffering, she coveted it; sacrifice was her joy, her happiness. And when, accompanying her Divine Son for the last time. she follows

His footsteps along the sorrowful way, when she ascends the hill of Calvary, where standing at the foot of the Cross she offers her life for the outraged glory of the Lord, and for the salvation of souls; then is the entire sacrifice and the perfection of immolation consummated by Divine charity, in this privileged heart. United to the Heart of her Son, she wished, herself unknown, to sacrifice all, to immolate herself for the glory of God and for the redemption of the world.

And now we must leave these high things (which are nevertheless very simple), these elevated but comforting considerations; and descending into your hearts, ask you, when you are going to accomplish this act of entire and complete immolation of self, what are the conditions which you must fulfil in order to imitate your Model and receive the graces which He has prepared for you? They are abundant; a brilliant crown awaits you, every privilege is yours, you are already receiving the hundredfold which He has promised. Yes, you are His cherished souls! Our Lord said, that to all it is not given to understand these words, "Leave all . . . and follow me," but blessed are they who do understand them, blessed are they who practise them! Our Saviour calls you, you have already left the impress of your footsteps in the path, assuredly you have felt the sword of sacrifice, and you will feel it; yes, you will carry your cross, a blessed, happy, but also painful cross; a sacrifice which Jesus

desires and which He loves. Then, in the fulness of your heart, in the sincerity of your soul, you will say: "Lord, dispose of me as it seemeth best to Thee; no, I will retain nothing of self, nothing of the world, nothing of earthly affections, nothing, nothing! I will die in Thy hands, to live solely unto Thee." It is indeed to you that the words addressed to the father of believers are applicable: "Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and come unto the land which I shall show thee." In the shelter of the religious life, separated from the world, from all that might have occupied your thoughts and your hearts, you live for God alone. The world held out its advantages before you, displayed its pleasures, joys and seductions before your eyes: all vanities, deceitful illusions! . . . Ah! in leaving all, in embracing the humility and poverty of Jesus Christ, you will find the true independence; you will no longer be subject to these sad exigencies which weigh down the best of lives, and for the direction and guidance of your future life, you will have nothing to do but to abandon yourselves to the Providence of God; it is He Who by work, rule, obedience and duty, leads you by the hand. Blessed children, you have God for a father, learn to conceive your own happiness!

Nevertheless in separating yourself from all that might smile on you in the world, in voluntarily abandoning all that you possess, you must be prepared to suffer. You

are religious, your state is a state of immolation, of victim: yes, you follow close to your Chief, and in the practice of duty, you will find the Cross; you will find it in the austerities, in the privations of community-life, in the exigencies of the rule. . . . You have not sought to live, suffer, and die for your own glory, but for that of your Lord, you wish that His Name should be known and made manifest; therefore when God places in your hands young hearts, young souls, you will say as you bend over them: "The Lord has chosen me to form these hearts according to His mind, to His love, to His virtues: can there be a more holy or sweet vocation? Yes, every moment, every force of my existence, shall be dedicated to gaining souls for Him, to perfecting them in His love."

You may indeed rejoice in your sacred vocation! bless the Lord! immolate yourselves! forget all that is of earth; look up to God, to Calvary, to the Heart of Jesus, to Mary standing at the foot of the Cross, and you will find, in abandoning yourselves, in retaining nothing which is not for the glory of God and the sanctification of your souls, peace, joy and recompense for all your sacrifices, besides the pledge of eternal felicity.

FIFTH CONFERENCE.

FEAST OF THE SEVEN DOLOURS OF MARY. THE SWEETNESS OF SACRIFICE.

(*In a Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Seven Dolours.*)

ET us meditate together quietly, in this holy sanctuary, upon the sorrows of Mary. This morning God seemed to inspire me, for reasons best known to Himself, to point out to you the hardness, the bitterness of sacrifice; let us turn to-night to its sweetness. For the soul that has immolated itself, the words have been written, that "in heaviness of heart lies peace, in peace is my bitterness most bitter." The Church applies these words to the dolours of Mary: "great as the sea is thy affliction;" and if they are to explain to us the depth and the immensity of the character of her grief, I believe they are also intended to signify the refreshing nature of the waters.

How do we find sweetness in sacrifice? Our Lord desired the laceration of His human nature, and of His Heart; He chose this for Himself, for His Mother, and

He chooses it for us; yet He says that it brings peace in its train, a bitter peace. . . . St. Paul exclaims: "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation," and who can doubt but that the heart of Mary, overwhelmed in grief, immolated all her life long, nevertheless tasted sweetness and a sorrowful peace, that peace of mind, that peace of God which surpasseth all understanding? Ah! if it were given to me to know, to feel, and to penetrate this mystery, what a store of sweetness might I not discover, oh! my God, both for myself, and for those souls whom I am addressing, sweetness in bitterness, and peace in suffering! How happy should we then be! We should have solved this mystery of faith, this alliance made between these two hearts, these two souls, Jesus and Mary! ever sacrificed, ever immolated in suffering and in peace! How can this union be? Oh! I know not! . . . Perhaps, by an act of complete resignation and blind abandonment of self, there is peace under the knife which severs and kills; I can believe that it is so. . . . In physical pain, a certain strength, a certain wisdom, perhaps give peace; but at any rate, by the grace of God in prayer, the soul ever finds peace and resignation. I suffer. . . . I am happy. I submit. I am buffeted by storms, my heart is desolated, my soul is tempted . . . but I love this pain, I resign myself under it. Yes, there are two natures within us, or if you prefer it, two distinct souls, the one superior to the other. The

superior half is the region of the mind which approaches nearest to God, which is nearest to the soul of our Saviour united to the Word, to the soul of Him Who was steeped in suffering, and yet rejoiced ever in the unalterable peace of God. It is well to recall this to mind, during the week, if we truly wish to apply these mysteries to ourselves, if we sincerely desire to associate ourselves with the Cross. I shall never tell you that in the path of holiness you will arrive beyond suffering—nature has such a horror of perfection, that to attain it we must suffer, and suffer severely —but as we desire it, as we love it, as we cling to it, we resign ourselves in embracing the Will of God, we accept the cross which God has laid upon our shoulders, gladly in all its weight, and all is peaceful and sweet. . . . Think of this, and try to say to yourselves: "Here are two things which are compatible, suffering and sweetness, peace and bitterness." This was the case, assuredly, in the highest degree with our Saviour, with Mary, with all the Saints. There are different degrees; certain souls God leads by the path of consolations, but they are very rare; for His own Son, and for Mary, such was not His Will. We may soften our pain by accepting it voluntarily, by resigning ourselves to it. As for myself, I read over and over again, and meditate upon that chapter of Ecclesiasticus, where the first four verses are summed up thus: "Wait on God with patience. In thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience." And when we

excite ourselves, when we struggle, when we argue, what happens? Nothing, or at least, nothing good. We must submit and resign ourselves in union with our Lord. The first condition of this mysterious alliance is the desire of compassionating the sorrows of Jesus, is that of suffering with Jesus. Suffering, is to weep with Jesus in His Agony; after that shall we despair of finding peace? No, rather we shall cry: "Oh! Lord, as Thou wilt! Give me neither consolation, joy, nor progress, provided my will may be surrendered wholly unto Thee, provided that I may live in sacrifices, all is the same to me!" and until we have attained to this generous disposition, we must ask for it, and unceasingly persevere in its pursuit. There is yet another means, still more powerful, of realizing this alliance. The true way to gain the peace, the sweetness of the Cross, is Divine charity, the love of Our Lord. Love does not consist in sensibility, in sentiment, in affections created by impressions. . . . True love lies in effects, in works, in deeds, in virtue, in devotion. The love of God is a prompt and brave determination to will only what God wills. There will be hesitations, warfare, perpetual vicissitudes, impediments, and languor; there will be faults, there will be sins. . . . For there is ever this miserable body which drags down the soul, and degrades it; but provided there exists in the innermost recess of the soul, a principle of steadfast devoted resolution, there is love, there is peace

which cannot be taken from us. Sin is easily atoned when we love! . . . With this disposition of a generous heart, temptations and trials of every kind must be of great service. In reading the lives of the Saints, do you find many who have had no sufferings, no trials? . . . and after Our Lord, look at Mary! . . . Come, my children, when pain, sacrifice, and duty, press heavily upon you, when you experience dryness and disgust, endeavour to make, if you will, a dry and bitter act of love to God, do it generously, with the full maturity and will of the soul which sincerely loves God for His own sake, walk in this path of generosity, which costs so dearly, and you will find peace. If you have not always hearkened to this language, if you have fainted by the way, if there have been days in which you have been unfaithful, it has been because you have failed to attach yourselves to this true love, unyielding as death, hard as a stone, bitter with exceeding bitterness, and yet very sweet. Fervour and sensible devotion is good for small minds; shake off those feminine ways, aspire to something more noble, more vigorous. As for ourselves, we have not one quarter of an hour's consolation in forty years. Come then! we must fortify ourselves and walk in faith's real path, by true love: the Cross is there, will be ever there, and God be praised for it! If that failed us, we should indeed be worthy of commiseration. . . . We must bear it; the more you resign yourself, the more you give your-

self up to be crushed and bruised by the Lord's Hand, the happier you will be, and whenever you resist Him, by trying to diminish the weight of your cross, you will suffer a hundred times the more. Our Saviour chose to endure the excess of anguish and of ignominy, so as to teach us, that in them we shall find peace and happiness.

You will, then, make Jesus Crucified your book, which you will read every day, and apply to yourselves; the world with its ridiculous sensibilities of self-love, and its pleasures, have nothing to do with the soul vowed to the Heart of Jesus, with the mind of the religious who has left all . . . Oh! what liberty, what sweetness in prayer is yours! . .

You understand and feel this, I am sure, for this is the time to gain the graces of the Cross; you must gain them thoroughly. This mystery of the Cross is as present to us, as it was to St. Magdalen, or to St. John; and you may be sure that you will not receive fewer graces than they. Our Saviour died as much for us as for them, the efficacy of His Sacrifice and His love are here with us now, just as though we had been present upon Calvary eighteen centuries ago.

Put on one side all distractions, all embarrassment, do what the Will of God commands you at the foot of the Cross; as you have to go hither and thither, from one place to another, keep yourselves as recollected as you can. You have not to act, to speak or to occupy

yourselves in a manner which requires the co-operation of the mind, therefore think of Calvary and remain there. . . . Try to forget your anxieties ; say : "My God, I desire the Cross ; I wish for Thy Cross ; give it me with strength to carry it, with love to love it." Ah ! what treasures of peace you will find ! . . . And when this language is habitual in a soul, what more is wanting ? Nothing, nothing ! address yourselves to Jesus and to Mary your Mother, and in this pious sanctuary, consecrated to the recollection of her griefs, ask that you may be united to her sufferings, to her bitterness, to her peace, to her love.

Oh ! yes indeed, there exists neither sweetness nor happiness, but in the bitterness of the Cross, and to a soul which truly loves God, enjoyment and pleasure are pain. . . . "To rejoice when my God has suffered, is grief to me ; to suffer, to deny myself, to abase myself, is my peace, my joy !" . . .

Well, then ! you understand that this was verified, was realized in the highest degree in the Heart of Mary ; peace and sweetness with sacrifice, that is evident ; yes, you all according to the degree which God destines for you, in His Will, will tread this path of Calvary, you will be meek and gentle with others and with yourselves, because you will have thoroughly immolated, thoroughly sacrificed yourselves : that is the grace which I desire for you.

SIXTH CONFERENCE.

PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST.

THE best disposition in which to receive the Holy Spirit, is that of quietness, expectation and desire. When our Saviour sent His disciples forth into the world, He bade them not depart immediately, but rest and wait awhile. This disposition is one for every day, it should precede all our meditations, every one of our devotional exercises, and the accomplishment of all our duties.

When a traveller is on a journey, were he to proceed without taking necessary rest, he would soon be exhausted with fatigue, and would never reach his destination: but if he halt from time to time to repose and refresh himself, he will be less weary and soon accomplish the journey; thus it is with the soul occupied in the work of its own sanctification: it needs rest, refreshment in prayer, and also an ardent desire.

Do you see this arid barren piece of ground, thirsting for moisture, longing to become fertilized? then when

the grateful rain falls, how refreshed is the earth, how it expands ! Thus it is that God takes care of our desires, and delights to prove to us in holy Scripture our need of them. We find in the Psalms, "With desire have I desired." And at the moment of revealing the Incarnation, God singles out Daniel on whom to confer this favour, because, say the Scriptures, he was "a man of desires."

It is desire which prays ; for prayer is aspiration towards God. It would be a delusion to fancy that we must feel a special attraction towards prayer ; if we were ever thus borne on angels' wings, it would not be difficult to draw near unto the light, to grow in grace, to renounce ourselves. We must take courage, and act with force, and when we cannot pray, we must excite the desire within us. The Apostles, before Pentecost, were full of imperfections ; even after the Resurrection of their Divine Master, they still acted, alas ! according to the impulses of nature, nevertheless there they were in the house together ! With a good will, they desired ardently, they persevered in prayer, repeating incessantly, "Come, Holy Spirit, transform us, change us, regenerate the world ;" and this is what drew down upon them all the graces of heaven. Let these dispositions be yours also ; if you desire, in spite of dryness, temptations and disquietudes ; if you beg of God His light, His grace, and all solid virtues, He will bless you, He will grant your prayer.

You may experience many heavy and wearisome days in

which you cannot reckon your progress, but, only desire and you will have the disposition of heart to which God ever responds.

Finally, when Our Lord bade His disciples *wait*, He added, "until you receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you." Yes, in the designs of God, grace, Divine charity, and all that sanctifies, ought to fill our hearts; often we wait, we seek without finding: it is evident that no term is fixed here below; that we know not the measure God destines for us: nevertheless if we are a prey to trouble and error, it is because we have not opened our hearts to His; we have not received grace in all its fulness; let a soul once abandon itself wholly to the Divine power, accepting the Divine Will fully and entirely, and the Holy Spirit will come and take possession; it is the best preparation to offer Him, in order to receive all His graces in the order which He has decreed for us. Recall to your mind any retreat, meditation, or fervent communion, how thoroughly you then accepted the action of God, and every inspiration of His love; you were then satisfied, as the dry ground when it has drunk in the gracious dew; and therefore you must put away from you all narrow-minded ideas, all complications, all commonplace wishings; God desires to shower down upon you a torrent of His benefits, not in order to spare you suffering and warfare, but that you may progress in solid virtues, in the spirit of renunciation and of sacrifice.

Above all, refuse nothing, whatever happens accept everything, beg of God to come and take possession of you ; then you will receive by degrees, according to His designs, the infusion of His gifts, which are as an endless stream, the source of which can never be exhausted.

Ah! I implore you, as you advance in life, detach yourselves from human thoughts, from natural inpressions, try to walk in God's path, to live by faith, to place yourselves within the sphere of His grace.

From the moment when the Church recalls to our minds the touching Feast of Pentecost, sit down to rest awhile, be calm, bid your busy thoughts be still, so as to offer yourselves quite *fresh* to God. Oh ! what sweet joys you will then experience. . . . May you be filled with the Holy Spirit, may He possess you ! and if God should reserve a strong, triumphant grace for you, do not refuse it ; do all that He commands, so that by a mutual union of your desires, and your sacrifices, you may offer yourselves together unto Him, a holy family after His own Heart ; this is the best wish I can form for you all.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE.

MARY IN HEAVEN.

IN order to begin the month consecrated to Mary in the true spirit of the Church, in order to honour it worthily, we must realize her crowned in her heavenly glory; we must separate ourselves from the affections of this earth, and wander amongst the innumerable legions of angels and saints, whom God inundates with His glory, we must take our stand amidst these blessed beings. Who is this whose throne is so exalted, and whom God has crowned queen of the heavenly realm? . . . It is Mary. . . . Then our faith and love are redoubled, our prayers more fervent, and our confidence pleasing to her heart. There are things which are impossible to our weakness; let us nevertheless attempt to climb up into heaven for an instant; our place has been marked there from all eternity, there we are to share in the happiness of the angels and of the saints, in the happiness of Mary herself; let us then try and stammer forth a few words about Mary in Heaven, her glory,

and her felicity. Let us ask ourselves what Divine influences abound in her soul through her recollections, her joys, and her desires; through her memories fraught with no mixture of regrets, from her joys to which nothing now is wanting, from the entire fulfilment of her hopes and wishes.

Firstly, then, in her recollections. Oh! doubtless there can be nothing painful in the memory of Mary. It is said of the Spouse in the Canticles: "Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come." So it is with Mary. Would it be possible that in her present glorified state, she should not remember the favours with which she was overwhelmed by the Most High? What! does not a hymn of thanksgiving, a profound sentiment of love, spring from her heart, when she recalls to mind the words of the patriarchs, the sayings of the prophets who announced her to the world, and that message of an angel, who bent in reverence before her! But what are we to say of the memory, of the anguish and torments of Calvary? Can there be grief and pain in heaven? Ah! these earthly dolours, these sacrifices, this Cross, are the glory and the joy of heaven! If Mary could have a regret, it would be that she had not suffered enough! Associated with the opprobrium of the Saviour, with His agony, with His anguish, she suffered for God; therefore is she now inundated with joy,

triumphant by His sufferings! "Jesus Christ," St. Paul tells us, "is crowned with glory because He suffered:" in the remembrance of her woes, Mary finds joy, because she loved the Cross, where she immolated herself with her Son for the glory of God, and for the salvation of the world. And we who lament, who shrink from the most trifling pain or trial, are we to have no part then in these memories of sorrows, in this union between love and suffering? "Oh! Mary, oh! Virgin, Queen of Heaven, tell me in what consists the glory and the joy of your recollections?" She replies: "My child, I have suffered much," and looking towards her Son, she sees His glorified Humanity, she beholds His sacred wounds, resplendent with glory; then she exclaims: "See Him, this Conqueror of the world, this Victor over hell! Jesus has suffered, Jesus was crucified! Holy angels, tremble for joy! Apostles, Martyrs, chant ye His triumph!" Jesus has suffered! this is the constant thought of heaven, its joy, its glory!

Well, then! when we have to work and to endure, let us not mourn over ourselves, but let us suffer lovingly! Jesus and Mary have traced our path of glory. Yes, heaven is the region of repose, of happiness; and when here below, with a thirst which consumes and deceives us, we go in search of happiness amongst earthly pleasures, how blind we are, what folly is ours!

Again, whence is Mary's joy? My children, she loves

God for Himself: Mary began upon earth the life of pure love, she has ever sought after the honour and glory of her God: grandeur, dignity, enjoyments, satisfactions, none for herself, all for her God. As she received the truth in all the splendour of its light, as she understood that God is the one sovereign good, so also nothing could arrest her looks upon earth. In the midst of anguish, grief, bitterness, and the most cruel immolation, she ever loved her God. What are our fleeting affections when compared with the love of Mary, even at the very highest pitch to which they sometimes attain of devotion and self-abnegation?

We are, alas! wrapped up in our earthly attachments, in these natural impressions which weigh upon us; with Mary, all is pure, all is divine. In prayer, it is true, there is something which spiritualizes us, but we know not how to live with eye and heart fixed upon God. Mary understood it. Ah! drink deeply of this divine joy; it is pure, because then one loves God for Himself; all the rest has vanished, no more thoughts of self arise: God alone! . . . In heaven, Mary loses herself! We say these things, and we do not comprehend them, nevertheless it must be true that there is there a torrent of delights and of beatitudes; we know that Mary must be rewarded! If we find these transports, these desires in the lives of the Saints, let us seek therein for something of Mary's love: we all, as far as we can, in a lesser degree

of course, ought to participate in this life of Divine charity; it is thither we are tending, we must follow the path, and keep our goal ever before our eyes, all else is but the means, the ways by which to reach it. We must make use of them as though they were a bridge thrown across the torrent of life; the shore and the port are God, Him alone. Let us seek God by prayer, in spite of distractions, and if sometimes a few sparks of this sacred fire by which Mary was consumed, present themselves, let us receive them gently, and hallowed by their holy influence, accept all the trials which God sends to detach us from earthly affections. Recollections! joys! we hardly dare utter the words, when we think of what St. John has ventured to say, that when we are in heaven, we shall be like to God, because we shall see Him as He is. Ah! in this view of God, under the impression of His love, we must indeed become identified with Him, and lose ourselves in Him; there is joy, glory, and beatitude!

Mary in heaven is then blissful in her memories: she is also happy in her wishes; Mary desires that which she has, that which will never be wanting to her: here is a mystery and a miracle; Mary desires the glory of God, what else could she wish for? She loves you, calls you by name, God has given you to her, and do you think that, herself identified with God, she does not desire His reign in your hearts? Ah! if you are found wanting one day, nothing will be lost to her we know, but you will

have forfeited happiness, glory, and your heavenly crown.

This then, is the subject of her supplications and prayers; in heaven Mary is a suppliant and is all-powerful: she is, of course, infinitely far below her Son, she claims neither the worship nor the homage due to Him alone; but loving us as she does, she asks for us the joys and the glories of the heavenly city; these are her desires—desires which commenced on earth, where they exhausted and consumed her even unto sacrifice. It is our duty also to have these desires of zeal: we must glorify God by saving souls, by devoting ourselves for them, by desiring to die in order to save them.

Henceforth, let this be our end; we must live and work, pray and suffer for souls, for God's sake alone. Let us shake off our wretched ideas, our miserable preoccupations, before these eternal thoughts of God, of His glory, and of the salvation of souls. We may indeed use the consolations God sends us, for the steering of our bark, for our help, but in order to begin the true, the heavenly life while yet here below, we must apply our desires to the salvation of the souls which are dear to us, and over whom we can exercise a certain influence. Ah! if all Christians were animated with this zeal, earth would be beautified, heaven would be peopled, God would be glorified.

Let us rest upon these thoughts; the remembrance

of Mary will make us lead better lives; our poor, weak hearts will be strengthened, and we shall rejoice in heaven already upon earth, until the moment when we shall abide there in everlasting rejoicing.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE.

ALL SAINTS DAY.

IN order to walk in the path of sanctity, we must conform to a certain primary and sovereign law, which it is well to recall to mind to-day: and two conditions are necessary to its fulfilment.

When we wish to become acquainted with the principle which has made saints, without doubt we must always refer back to grace; it is grace which operates, which acts in a soul, but it does not work alone, there is a condition to its actions. What then is this law which has the making of saints?

Interrogate your memories, question your minds and hearts upon what you recollect of the origin and progress of such and such a person whose name is held in veneration by the Church. It is true that at some epoch marked out in God's designs, perchance after years of hesitation, after perhaps many falls, there is a moment when a soul decides upon becoming sanctified, makes a law out of this decision of the will. You remember the

reply of St. Thomas Aquinas, that great doctor of the Church, when he was asked by his family what one must do to become a saint. "You must *will*," he said, "and that is enough."

Again, remember what our Saviour says in the Gospel: "If thou wilt be perfect." These words have not been uttered in vain; it is a great truth which they comprehend: I wish you also to recollect that in the book of Spiritual Exercises left us by our blessed father, these words are perpetually recurring: "I will ask of God, that which I will, that which I desire." . . . We must will then; oftentimes we must even will that which we do not wish, that which is repugnant to nature, that which is most displeasing to us. . . . I beg of you, let the first moment of the day be for you one of firm resolution, of a steadfast will to lead a serious Christian life. If you hesitate, if you deliberate with grace, all is lost: believe me, you must will. Take notice that there is not a single obstacle, not a single temptation which may not be overcome by this means; to will is that over which we have power. When it comes to the feeling of joy and of consolation, I grant that it is not in our own power, but to decide upon what God wills, to obey, depends upon ourselves alone. When in prayer of a morning, you determine to will throughout the day, when you give your whole heart to God, do you not believe that this offering is graciously accepted?

You, on your side, have done all that was requisite, for progress is not your concern, you have only to excite, nourish and strengthen the will. I am well aware that your weakness will cause you sometimes to fail, but that is a reason to will all the more strongly: the more obstacles you feel within you, the more energetic and persevering should be your will.

But, you say, how is this precious gift of the will to be acquired? By prayer; you must resolve in praying. Search the Lives of the Saints, transport yourself in spirit into the midst of the Church triumphant of the glorious hearts of the martyrs and confessors, is there a single one who rested a moment without this energetic will of which I have been speaking to you? Observe how that force simplifies things, and opens out for the soul a path of peace and liberty! How many times have we not told each other that we must not reason much, but that we must pray much, will much, with a fixed, generous effective determination!

Let us now seek the means which may aid us in the attainment of this end: the first of all is as follows: children of our divine Mother, you must say this to yourselves: "I am called to live the interior life, the life of prayer and meditation; there is no excuse, no pretext which shall turn me from it," and here the word impossible does not exist, for whether in joy, in sorrow, in bitterness, or in satisfaction, the soul can ever turn towards God; dry-

ness is of no account. I was reading yesterday, a page of St. Theresa, and I remarked how that saint, in the midst of ecstasies and of extraordinary favours, applied herself to all that was true and substantial. All that she says of prayer in meditation is noteworthy; we may believe it without fear; there is nothing she exaggerates except her faults. . . . "Great God! I who have neglected meditation, who have given it up as too fatiguing, how guilty have I been to pass years without this holy exercise!" We must persevere in it in spite of everything. "It is," as she writes in some admirable pages, "the road which leads to union with God. Oh! how we must attach ourselves to it! the devil tries to render it difficult above everything to us, to make us neglect it, under no matter what pretexts; well then," adds St. Theresa, "if a soul, despite this difficulty, perseveres in meditation, it is saved, it will attain perfection:" do not think that I am exaggerating her language, I am rather enfeebling the force of her expressions.

With this desire of reaching perfection, if we attach ourselves to the interior life, we shall soar above this material world which surrounds us, we shall be in another country and breathe another atmosphere; if this resolution to will is well established in the depth of your soul, you will succeed even though you should commit grave faults; I repeat, you will succeed.

But then, how are we to set about this will of mental

prayer? Is it not true that we ever bear self about with us; this year, as well as those that are to follow, shall not we be ever seeking self in all things? The desire of finding our own repose, our own ease, our own consolation, obliges us to be constantly on our guard by a veritable interior self-abnegation. My God! I do not say that we must not seek near Thee for strength and consolation; but if we make the finding of our personal satisfaction our end, it is not the glory of God, the good pleasure of Our Lord which directs us; the will is not entire, there will be many mistakes. God is good, just and liberal; but He is also strong; he does not approve of this seeking after consolations. The will acquires all its force when we propose to ourselves to serve God for Himself. "No, my God, I will not serve Thee that I may be rewarded; it is not Thy gifts which I seek, but Thy good pleasure, Thy Will, Thyself." If you attach yourselves to meditation in order to find in it your nourishment, your bread, if you give it a sustained attention and persevere in it in spite of everything, you will grow: and if you neither desire consolation nor comfort, but seek only Our Lord and His holy Will; if you give yourself to the Heart of Jesus without analysis, without reserve, you will have fulfilled the law, you will be in that condition by which saints are made. May you find a blessing with these thoughts: the closer you are united to God by interior

prayer, the more you immolate yourself for Him, the sooner you will find this joy, this unalterable peace which I desire for you, and which we will ask for together, this very day.

NINTH CONFERENCE.

EVE OF THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

TO-MORROW we celebrate the feast of our Immaculate Mother, let us salute this day with rejoicing; let us open our hearts to a sincere disposition of the actions of grace, and let us remember that the best homage we can offer to Mary, is assuredly to try and reproduce some few of her virtues in ourselves.

Mary was preserved from original sin, and from all its interior consequences; she was ever obedient to exterior events, to sufferings, woes, and death; but from that home of sin, concupiscence, which we all bear about within us, Mary was preserved; she was privileged, as was the first man, and far beyond him; even beyond the very angels. In presence of this type of perfection, which surpasses all idea, let us try to grasp a few salient points which will help our own spiritual progress.

In Mary's soul, the fundamental gift was certainly the free and entire action of Divine love; it was union with God: thus in Mary, there was ever this tendency, this

pure and true action of the heart which seeks God alone, whose sole desire is to be united with Him, to live by His love; this was the life of her life. Nothing could alter this direction, distract or share it; nothing could take from her soul this perfect and peaceful reign of the love of God. Adam had enjoyed the same advantages, but in far inferior proportion. Since his fall, Divine love has become difficult to us, his poor children; we are not inclined for it, it is hard to us to love God. And when, in the purity of His spirit, in His holiness, He wishes us to love Him for His own sake, we prefer this earth and carnal things which flatter and please our senses to Him; we pursue an ideal which is but of this world. The love of God is not the end to which we instinctively turn, and if grace sometimes leads us back towards it, sometimes in our days of retreat, of recollection, and of prayer, it does not last; and yet, in God alone is to be found rest and happiness! We agitate and weary ourselves about many things; the love of God is not our life. Well, then! let us ask this immaculate Heart, whose sole occupation was love, to aid our miserable nature to rise above its earthly ties, to detach itself from the world, to seek after heaven alone. Let us endeavour, by generous efforts, to immolate ourselves in faith and charity, so that that Divine love alone may rule within us. We read in the sacred writings these words, addressed to us by Jesus Christ: "Seek ye therefore first, the kingdom of God."

St. Paul also exhorts us to seek the Lord, and taste of the things of God ; our nature hinders us, we were conceived in sin, and if sanctifying grace is given us in baptism, if it is increased by the sacraments, which are the bearers to us of Divine charity, it is only preserved within our hearts by labour, by holy desire, and by the renunciation of self. Let us accept these conditions, asking God to give us this leaning towards Him, of which the heart of Mary offers us so perfect a model.

Mary possessed in the highest degree of perfection the privileges of original righteousness and innocence ; in her, nature and senses were alike in submission to Divine action, there was not the slightest rebellion, the slightest contradiction, not the slightest struggle between nature and grace ; Mary was sovereign queen, absolute in her empire ; there was nothing in her thoughts contrary to the order of God in holiness and truth ; not a deviation, not a fluctuation, not a shadow of doubt in her heart, not a divided affection, inclination, or wish ; all was bathed in God's light : how different a state from ours ! Can you conceive the perfect order which reigns in a soul that is tranquil and submissive, an obedient mistress of herself? In this soul, there are neither assaults, nor contradictions, but liberty full and entire, God, His love, His glory, all that is purest and best : when suffering offers itself, it is God Who sends it, and Mary accepts it ; a sword of woe transfixes her soul at the prophecy of the

aged Simeon, but she does not wish to remove it, she allows it to bury itself in her heart, and loves and cherishes her wound. In the humiliations of her Divine Son, she unites herself to His Cross and sacrifice; these two hearts walk together in a perfect obedience; in them is order, peace, and the reign of God in all its purity. We have lost this privilege which Adam enjoyed; he reigned over himself, and mystery of mysteries, when he fell, he was filled with true light; there were in him neither the desires of concupiscence, nor the darkness of ignorance; this is what reveals the enormity of his crime; his disobedience was the effect of a calculation against the direction of the Divine charity. We endure the sad results: in the course of one day we can hardly count a few minutes in which order reigns in our soul, in which all is obedient to grace to the spirit of God: hardly can we say one "*Ave Maria*" without distractions, our spirit cannot follow two ideas, and yet we are proud of ourselves! . . . Truly we have great reason to be proud of our weak, fallen, complicated, uneasy, languid, ease-loving natures! The privilege of interior dominion is lost, we no longer have this government of ourselves. How rarely do we act with moderation, or guide ourselves according to the wisdom of God! We have doubtless many good impulses; but they pass as a flash of lightning; they are as a flame which shines for an instant, and are succeeded by lan-

guor, disgust, darkness, researches after inferior, miserable, fleshly pleasures!

Let us now contemplate the Heart of Mary, and we shall understand the grandeur of her privileges, the grandeur of the dogma which the Church has solemnly proclaimed; the Immaculate Conception is a solitary example of nature rehabilitated and replaced in original justice to a supereminent degree. We cannot attain unto this estate, but we can attain to the conquest over self, which is the sole manner in which we can imitate the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We are like a king dispossessed of his territory; we must reconquer it, and spend all our life in the warfare; let us set out at once and dedicate ourselves to battle: let us give to God that which He demands of us, by patience, gentleness, regularity, detachment from creatures, and renunciation of our own will. If we cannot do this of ourselves, it is possible to accomplish it by grace; by dint of sacrifices we shall not succeed in recovering a complete empire over nature and the senses, but we shall materially lessen our difficulties, our faults, and our failures. Is not this the object of our prayers? and wherefore so many instructions, devotions, and pious exercises, if it is not to reconquer our possession of ourselves, to give to grace the empire over nature? When you are at the feet of your divine Mother, in all the recollection and fervour of communion just received, render glory to God for the special privilege of Mary's

Immaculate Conception; then ask for yourselves, generosity, strength, and patience in combat, and the grace to triumph over yourselves!

May these sweet and serious thoughts, and the remembrance of the noble end to which we are striving excite us to valour! We shall conquer by mortification and prayer. Open your hearts to love, have confidence in your beloved Mother, whose wish is to overwhelm you with her gifts.

TENTH CONFERENCE.

THE END OF A RETREAT.

SPIRITUAL exercises, in the wise arrangement of their different methods, give a distinctive type to our lives. The fruit of a retreat is intended to preserve this type, to retain this guiding thread which is to lead us in the direction of grace. Amidst all the deviations of our miserable nature, we must have a fixed point of departure, and even a port to which we can return! You have found a place for both in your souls, by this conviction: "I belong to God, I am going to God, therefore I will choose and love that only which will lead me to this end; there is the principle, there is also the term, the spot of repose; whatever happens, I will go to God, the rest must pass before my eyes as a vain, fleeting shadow." . . . At this moment, you are strong, peaceful, and closely united to God, but as you pursue your way, you will meet with your old weaknesses, you will again feel infinitely miserable at the reminiscences of the past and the infirmities of the present, ever seeking to

renew the combat; and you may be sure that you will fall again, but whatever happens, recall to your minds this eternal lesson, that the soul united to God, finds in the fault committed, a means by which to raise itself anew towards its Creator in repentance and faith. One says to oneself: "It is indeed my old self I meet with again: I believed myself changed; not yet! ah! I must suffer, love, humble myself, and bless my forgiving God. At the foot of the Cross, I will hope, I will rejoice, I will abide." Do you know, that in the mercy of the Lord, this very permission to sin is perhaps a benefit: not indeed that God creates the offence which wounds His Heart, but because He desires to receive humility and confidence at any price: "My Lord, blessed art Thou, I will abase myself, and will raise myself up once again."

Henceforth, I beg of you to hold in horror all disquietude and complications: these broodings, these returns into self are the snares of the devil; yes, he delights in them, he dances over your soul. If you could only see him! Make war then upon all these mean trivialities, upon these broodings over self, forget them, leave them behind, go on forwards!

Day dawns, the sun breaks forth: blessed hour! When Our Lord discloses Himself as a Consoler, is it not true that His Voice penetrates into the very bottom of your heart? But I warn you, you will forget Him, you will not be able always to contemplate His adorable Per-

son, to taste the force and energy of His doctrine. At any rate, try to accustom yourselves to be always in His presence, think of Him in His journeys, in His teachings and mysteries, contemplate Him, live familiarly with Him: count upon His grace, pray, solicit, persist: here should be your life. After all, you cannot be for ever in retreat, under this sweet and blessed influence, since you have to act, to suffer, and to fight; but grace remains in the soul, and with grace, all means, especially that of the persistency which attaches itself to the Person of Our Lord, which desires to know Him and to love Him; do not keep one day, not one hour for yourselves.

In the third week of the exercises, we follow Jesus Christ up to Calvary; there He suffered, there He awaits you; you will go there whether you will or not, and in proportion to the resistance you make, so will be your suffering. You feel your weakness; but in contemplating the excess of His love, in beholding Him annihilating Himself, suffering the uttermost woe to prove to you how He loves you, you will find, in spite and even because of your ingratitudes, a powerful incentive to suffer and to sacrifice yourselves. Have, then, ever before your eyes, in these sorrowful days, the remembrance of the Passion and of the mercifulness of the Lord. Woe unto us, if we find not in the depths of our hearts, something which binds us closely to this Cross, to this passion for suffering, like those angels of peace who wept bitterly over the

Saviour's death! When you think that all is lost, look up at the Cross, and pray until your soul finds peace, and tastes of the joy of Calvary.

I have spoken perhaps, more gravely than I intended; now let us find out together what is the grace we must ask for in the fourth week? You must rejoice in the immense joy of Jesus Christ risen, you must share in His glory, and in His triumph, and accompany Him into heaven, keeping your soul ever in this supernatural sphere, which elevates it above things of earth. There will be days when you are upon Calvary, but rise, mount up to heaven, and as you pass from one to the other, rejoice always! My God, if I could but forget self, lay down my restless mind, and always rejoice! . . . You must try courageously to do this, and ask for grace to do it persistently; there can be no spiritual life without this forgetfulness of self in the joy of the spirit.

Well then, think over all I have said to you, quietly and calmly; be faithful and generous, detach your hearts from this world; we have but a few more days to sojourn here, and then we shall meet again, where there will be no more retreats, but where we shall gather the fruits of our efforts, and of our sacrifices, united to the Cross of our Saviour.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE.

MEANS OF PROGRESS IN PIETY.

IT has struck me, my children, that it may be useful, at the conclusion of our conversations together, to give you some advice, and suggest to you a few practices by which you may progress in piety, and advance the more rapidly towards that perfection, at which we ought all of us to aim. And in this, you must not deceive yourselves, for you all know that there is an invariable rule, an infallible truth, in the work of perfection, that if we do not advance, we are going back; it is impossible to remain stationary. Therefore, it is my wish to present you with a few of the means by which you may arrive at perfection, that you may think over them during these approaching months, which by most of you, will be spent in the calm and solitude of the country. They are easy and simple, and may be associated with your every day lives without annoying or interfering with anyone. These means or practices, by which to reach perfection, are five in number: 1stly, Prayer; 2ndly,

Spiritual Reading; 3rdly, Watchfulness over self; 4thly, the Blessed Sacrament; 5thly, Works of Charity.

But above everything important, my children, is exactness in the regulation of your time. First of all, have a fixed hour for prayer; let it follow immediately after that of your rising in the morning, which, if your health permits, should be as early a one as possible. Fix a time for your spiritual reading, for your meditation, whether it be in the church or in your own room. Exactness is an essential point in life, without it, we do nothing; regulate beforehand all your occupations, and then be punctual to the times you have appointed. There will be days, when in spite of your firm intentions, you will find it impossible to conform to these rules, but return to them afterwards, and adhere to them faithfully.

1stly, then, *Prayer*. I have already said so much on this subject, my children, that there does not remain much more to tell you. You know that there are two kinds of prayer, vocal prayer, and mental prayer; in this respect, everyone must consult her own inclinations, and the vent of her heart; but although mental prayer is of the two, by far the most preferable, we must adhere to the habit of using some vocal prayers. Amongst these latter, I recommend to you the chaplet, which is, as you know, the third part of the Rosary. Do not let a day pass without reciting a few decades at least; you are aware that in order to gain the indulgences and satisfy

strictly the wishes of its holy Foundress, you must manage to say the whole Rosary in course of the week: therefore you should divide its recital so as to attain this end.

2ndly, *Spiritual Reading.* I look upon the habit and use of reading some devout work as of the greatest importance for you, my children: it is the basis of prayer, is what forms and consolidates piety. But in order that the reading may produce these precious results in you, it must have three qualifications: 1stly, it must be solid; 2ndly, it must be appropriate to yourself; 3rdly, it must be consecutive. Solid, that is to say, this reading must be made in works that are really pious, and written by persons accustomed to treat these kinds of subjects. Appropriate, that is, in accordance with your position in the world, with the disposition of your heart, with your peculiar turn of mind, which you must consult a little even in devout things, as a sort of clue given you by God to indicate the road you are to take to go to Him. If you wish me to give you more precise indications on this subject, I will mention two works which are the basis and foundation of the spiritual life, and of which one serves as the complement of the other. The first is "*La Perfection Chrétienne*," by Rodriguez, which, although written by a religious, and intended for the use of religious, is none the less good and useful. The second is, "*L'Amour et la Connaissance de Notre Seigneur Jesus Christ*," by Le Père St. Jure. Nothing could be more

solid than these two works, nothing could better contribute to the welfare of your soul. I do not speak of the "Following of Christ," and of the "New Testament," because they are the *Vade-Mecum* of the Christian, he ought to go nowhere without them; and on days when you find it impossible to accomplish your spiritual reading, read one verse only of these. The soul will be by this means nourished, refreshed, strengthened, and prepared for meditation. I have already told you, I think, of the Pères Avancin, Griffet, and Nouet. Be careful to prepare your meditation by two or three minutes' reflection the evening before. You ought to neglect no means which may aid you to fidelity in so essential a matter. Also, your reading must be consecutive. When you have commenced a book, go straight through it, not taking it up and putting it down for another. And when you are reading, why should you not make an occasional note of those things most suitable to your soul? You will look at these notes afterwards with both pleasure and profit, and thus will lose nothing which might be for the good of your soul, or for the furtherance of your spiritual progress.

3rdly, *Watchfulness over yourself.* This, my children, is one of the most essential of points. Were we to live for a hundred years, double the span of an ordinary life, had we attained a high degree of perfection, there would still be work for us to do in our own hearts. Alas! we are born in misery, we are weak, we fall repeatedly in spite of our

resolutions, but we must not be discouraged, we must correct ourselves, and begin again without ceasing. This work upon oneself resembles that of the artisan with his file; each time he draws it backwards or forwards, a little dust is his only visible result, and yet nevertheless, he accomplishes his task. Doubtless, fifteen, twenty years hence, you will still find yourself falling into the very same faults which afflict you at this moment; faults with which others perhaps reproach you bitterly; but do not lose heart for all that, work and fight without respite. And remember, that this is a duty, a necessary, an essential thing to do. Even supposing that in certain practices of devotion, you find sweetness and consolation, yet unless you work at the improvement of your character, unless you correct your faults, great deceptions await you.

If you now ask me what means you should take for the correction of yourself, I know of none to recommend you so efficacious as examination of conscience. Seek, with the aid of your confessor, to discover what is the besetting sin you have to fight against, what is most antagonistic to perfection, what is most in opposition within you to the interior supernatural life, then, in course of the day, pause for a few moments and examine your conscience with regard to how you have struggled against this predominant defect. In the morning, when you awake, think over the occasions in which you are likely to fall, and the things which are likely to lead you astray;

in the afternoon, withdraw into yourself and see if you have been faithful to your morning's resolutions, and then say: "Oh! my God, by the help of Thy grace I have been so happy as to remain faithful to Thee, grant me the grace so to continue." If you have not had the courage to resist, say: "Oh! my God, I have had the misfortune to offend Thee, but I will do better for the future; pardon me, my Lord." In the evening, when you say your prayers, you will again have recourse to this examination, and I promise you that if you are faithful to this practice, you will make great progress. Rodriguez, in his work upon Christian Perfection, gives a special and extremely practical course of self-examination in detail

4thly, *the Blessed Sacrament.* Many of you, I believe, have the privilege of possessing the Blessed Sacrament in your homes, Our Lord is under your roof, is a guest of the house. Some others are so near to their parish church, that they can visit it without any difficulty several times a day. In the country, our Saviour is so much alone! people pass backwards and forwards so often before the church, without ever entering it! . . . And yet Jesus Christ is there, waiting to crown us with His graces and favours; will you not go and ask for them? . . . Ah! I do implore of you, my children, be constant to the habit of visiting the Blessed Sacrament, spend a quarter of an hour every day with Our Lord. If it were a father, a mother, or a friend, should you not be over-

joyed to go and see them, to bear them company? It is Jesus Christ Who awaits you, Who calls you, ah! will you not listen to His Voice? And nevertheless, you have more leisure in the country than in town: but your life passes in such idleness and desultoriness, that the hours roll by, and you have no time to go and kneel at the feet of Jesus. And by naming the Blessed Sacrament as one of the means of advancing in perfection, it it is needless to say that I also allude to frequent communion. What better or more efficacious means can you have! Consult your director on this point, have a rule, and keep faithfully to it. Some of you, perhaps, wish to know whether, if the house is filled with guests, and others will remark your conduct, you should abstain from communicating? In your place, my children, I should in nowise change my habits, I should approach the Holy Table on the usual days, and you may be sure that by so doing, you will give rise to no disagreeables. At the most, you might change the day of your communion so as to avoid some misplaced remark, some untoward behaviour; but habitually, go to communion without fear. This simplicity can be attended with good results only.

5thly, *Works of Charity.* It appears to me, my children, that your life being less occupied in the country, you ought to fill up some of your leisure time with works of charity. Why not take one or two days in the week to visit the poor, or to receive them at home, to visit the

schools of the sisters, or to teach the Catechism to a few poor, ignorant children? Ah! there requires something more solid than all the Utopias dreamed of by the would-be wise philosophers, to reconcile the poor and the rich. Make yourselves beloved, my children, I do not forbid you to seek the affection of those around you; provided that you give all the glory to God, as is fitting and just. Be affable and kind to these poor people, sympathize with them in their wants and troubles, and rest assured that a few words thought over beforehand, in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and said to the point and at the right moment, will be of more avail to both their souls and yours than all the dreams of economists.

Now, at the moment of separating and dispersing, let me once more bid you pray, my children. Pray for each other; it is the bond of unison between you; pray for the Church; pray for yourselves, and believe that God will delight in showering His benedictions upon you.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE.

THE END OF MAN.

THE aim of a retreat, is, unmistakably, that of drawing nearer to God, of becoming firmly established in His Will, His Grace, His Love. It is the moment in which to purify the soul, to regulate our life according to the Divine Will, and to apply our whole force of determination to the work. Nothing is more simple, and nevertheless, in one sense, nothing is more difficult. To aid and to conduct us, we have the truths of Faith, familiar to all Christian souls; we must meditate upon them, and sound their depths, for often our thoughts are not God's thoughts; the influences of the world, the preoccupations of life, terrestrial interests affect us; and yet, to accomplish God's designs, to understand and accept His thoughts . . . we must put the question to ourselves, what are they? what is His Will? I would suggest to you, in the inward recollection of your souls, to try and forget everything but God Himself, so as, in a spirit of prayer and faith, to contemplate His

innermost thoughts. Faith is His Word made manifest, and we must therefore give the conviction of our heart to revealed truth. Before it, we must seat ourselves awhile, rest and reflect.

What are God's thoughts? The prophet has said "My thoughts are not your thoughts." Those which enter our heads in the world, amongst the multiplicity of our occupations and affairs, are not thoughts of God; to learn what they are, we must leave the world and rise in spirit, even unto Him. Oh God! I prostrate myself, despite my nothingness and my weakness, before Thy majesty and infinite wisdom; I dare to interrogate my Lord and Master: what didst thou think about me, when creating me? what destiny didst thou reserve for me? God, in the bosom of His incommensurable eternity, sufficed to Himself: He is the Infinite, the Sovereign good, the Perfect; beside Himself, He has need of nothing: His destiny is Himself; in His Essence He knows and delights in Himself; He reposes in His Word, who is His Son, and in His Holy Spirit: here is His Essence, what He has been, what He is in His eternity. And this is Faith!

God, who subsists in His three adorable Persons and is self-sufficing, had no need to create mankind; He might, besides the Trinity, have created or not have created, have sent His Son, or not have sent Him upon earth; but He did it all out of His goodness, because

He loved to extend His goodness. God created; it was a pleasure to Him, but a pleasure of pure love and charity; whilst creating, He obeys at the same time a grand law, He can act only for His own glory and for Himself alone.

"Behold my servant," says the prophet, in speaking of the humanity of the Word; and St. Paul says, "To God alone be honour and glory!" So that you can already understand this one, sovereign and universal thought of God. His glory and His honour are the tribute due to Him from everything that has breath.

God has created angels and men; to both He has given a free will, capable of loving. For what end is the creature to use this will and this love? In order that he may know, love and serve His God and thus promote His glory.

Therefore, try to forget it as we may, our being has no other cause; we live, we will, we are created for the glory of God . . . here is a fact. . . . This is not a theory, but a practical, obligatory and primary truth; we were created only that we might obey God and serve Him. In what does this glory consist? In the submission and dependence of the free, intelligent creature. Well! are you obedient and submissive? Is God the source and the end of all your actions and of all your thoughts? No? then you fail in the end of your existence.

How many plans are made, and ambitious designs conceived without a thought of God! how many actions are there more or less trivial, how many deviations from this one end of our being! In the celestial hemisphere we know that the heavenly bodies obey a law which preserves them in their appointed order: they have a course to travel, and a circle to follow, from which they may never turn aside, otherwise disorder and chaos would reign: how much more is not this the case, when the soul turns away from God, Who is her end! The law of gravitating towards God is a law of life, and yet we forget it, and often God is a stranger to us!

Oh! give me a heart which loves God and lives by His Faith; the whole end of its existence is fulfilled, for if the love of God reigns in a heart, can it ever offend, outrage or forget its Creator? Never! . . . But when we mingle together earthly things with divine, when the will is weak and vacillating, oh! then the soul experiences uneasiness and misery. Let us ask ourselves now at this moment: whither turn our thoughts? where are our affections concentrated? is our life consecrated to God? Have we the love of Him in our hearts? Oh! if we love God, in spite of our falls, in spite of our stumblings, we may be tranquil and at peace.

There is another truth which makes part of the above and is also its natural consequence: we were created to save and sanctify ourselves and to reach heaven: if we

understand this, we shall know, as we are taught by the Council of Trent, "that our salvation gives glory to God." God, Who is Charity, could never have given life to the creature, except to manifest in him the seal of His glory, and to make him a partaker in eternal happiness; to seek and to accomplish the glory of God is alliance with the Divinity Himself, and we ought to bless God for having imposed this obligation upon us!

If we do not save our soul, all is lost. The Saviour came to teach us that we must elevate ourselves above the things material which last but for a day. Oh! yes, indeed, our end, our happiness is to glorify God. God is consistent with Himself, He displays an admirable logic of love and munificence. Together with original sin humanity has to support struggles and conflicts, but if God has permitted that our liberty should be employed to His own detriment, at the same time He has given us all possible means of going to Him; everything that is upon the earth, in the sea, or in the heavens, may aid our soul to raise itself to God—everything, the graces of redemption, the promises of the Saviour, sacrifices, sufferings. . . . God Who enters our hearts, Who awaits us, seeks us, solicits us, invites us to think of Him, all these are means given us that we may attain our salvation.

Woe to the heart which despairs! Man suffers, but God sees it, knows, blesses him, and desires to crown and glorify him one future day.

Here, my children, is what it is to think of God: everything else is error and uncertainty. What then must you do? Leave all that keeps you from God, and do all that can draw you nearer to Him.

Your soul, like a traveller who steadily pursues his way, must be able at every instant of your life, to say, "I am going to God, I am following my road." If we turn aside, if we wander at random, or turn back to place our destiny in created things, instead of going on straight towards God, what sadness, what anguish will take possession of us! We must question ourselves repeatedly: "where am I going? what are my habits? what am I seeking? do I live by faith? is it for God that I fight, that I resist? But if I find myself led astray by the thousand interests and preoccupations of the world and of my own family, if my heart is absorbed in either grief or pleasure; if I do not resist temptation and the fickleness of my inclinations . . . then is the time to recollect myself, to rest awhile and think and pray, and the light of God will assuredly come to my assistance."

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE.

ON SIN.

YOU know, full well, that there is only one safe port and sure refuge in life, which is devotion to God, and the place which it fills in the front rank of our thoughts and affections. You must reanimate your faith, and remember that the glory of God and the salvation of the soul, are the sole things to be desired; recollect yourselves then, and reflect that God has prepared this retreat for you, that you may seek and find therein new light and new strength.

In this disposition we must call to mind two great truths: firstly, the evil which exists in our souls, secondly, the justice of God which awaits us, in other words, sin and hell. The first thought that strikes us, is that our faith is not strong enough to discover sin as instantly as we should: we do not believe it to be what it is—the only real misfortune, the ruin of all that is good, a pestilence from which we should fly above all other scourges.

You do not sufficiently believe that any grave sin is de-

serving of all your tears, all your sorrow and all possible expiation: you do not realize this enough. It is a fact, attested by the Word of God, that sin exists; that it is death to the soul and separates it eternally from Him, unless atoned for. It is a matter of faith that there is a sin which causes us to lose grace, renders us the enemies of God, and the slaves of Satan, and can we say, on looking back over the years that are gone, that such a sin never entered our hearts? do you think that in your present life, with its worldly customs, with your frivolity, with your lukewarmness, that your will has never once swerved from the right path, by finding its satisfaction in things created? Is that impossible? Alas, No!

It is also of faith, that there is a hell which sin merits; our Saviour's own words affirm it; at the same time that He calls the just to life everlasting, He condemns the guilty into everlasting fire. Many weak minds, falsely sensitive hearts, refuse to understand the union of this Divine justice and mercy. But it is a heresy to deny eternal punishment! and we must make an act of faith upon this great truth: "My God, I believe that there is a sin which gives death to the soul; I believe that there is a hell, because Thou hast revealed it and the Church teaches it." Here are two dogmas, two acts of faith.

There are two points of resemblance between sin and hell: sin is free, hell is also freely incurred; we cannot be damned without choosing and knowing it; but we

must make no gross illusions to ourselves, by fancying that we have never done any evil, or that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with. Often people in the world deceive themselves strangely in spite of having faith and being of Christian habits! When we let our life run its course at random, abandoning ourselves to every whim, giving our tongues liberty to abuse and defame our neighbour; when we take a delight in listening to tales of scandal, when we give ourselves up to vanity and idleness, do we never commit a grave sin? Oh yes, my children, and many a one! It is the story of the rich man over again; he did not commit excesses, but he lived in a superfluity of luxury and of dainty meats, and therefore he was condemned to hell. Ah! we must indeed pray that we may know ourselves; we must weigh our words, our actions, our lives.

For infancy, for youth, for middle age, reparation is necessary. How many faults! how many omissions we find! . . . No, you have not offended God unknowingly, and if you have fallen through ignorance, it was by your own consent to such a state; but all may be repaired in one moment; sin is of free-will, but so is repentance: God is grieved that He has to punish, and tells us so by the mouth of one of His prophets!

Hell was created not for the prodigal, but for the rebel, and hell is also free. Hell, or sin, means, the loss of God, means the soul separated from His grace and from His

Divine friendship, because she chose so to be ; when the soul which is parted from the body by death, has not atoned for her faults, hell changes nothing of the state in which she chose to die. God does not create a novel condition ; that soul is what she chose to be ; the flames and torments of which the Gospel speaks are the least of her torments ; hell consists especially in the loss of God.

What ! this soul who had received the power of loving God, of consecrating herself to Him, who had been embellished with all the gifts of nature and of grace, who could win heaven and be placed in the rays of the Divine light, here she is, for ever separated from God ! This is hell ! Oh ! ungrateful, frivolous, unthinking souls, if you did but know the gift of God, the good which you are losing ! if you would but think of this necessity of loving God, if you had but the will to reform your lives ! One second of repentance would suffice, for one tear shed in God's sight wipes out the whole of a lifetime ! One thing only is necessary, the fulfilment of the duty of loving God.

Let us see now, in what respect sin and hell do not resemble each other. Yesterday I said that there was but one obstacle to our sanctification : the love of self, of our own tastes, of our own satisfaction ; well then, in sin, there are a few pleasures, otherwise no one would do wrong. Yes, there is a certain delight in malice, in irri-

tability, in vanity, in anger, in pride; this enjoyment brings its own punishment, but still it exists. See into what a state of degradation we have fallen; we find our pleasure in evil. Now; this is the difference, in hell there is no more pleasure nor joy; sin is sin, disorder is disorder, here on earth it is otherwise, for the love of pleasures blinds the soul.

There is yet another difference, which is, that in this world, according to the expression of the prophet "man drinketh iniquity like water." Sinners never reflect, they jeer at timorous and faithful souls, they justify crime, they have no sentiment of evil.

For the sinner, the loss of God is nothing, he says: "I sleep, eat, and amuse myself, what then is it to lose God?" he does not even perceive that anything is wanting. But in hell he does perceive it, because there he knows what he has lost, and the separation of the soul from God is torture. Thus then, if we find the love of God growing weak within us, we must revive our fears, and dread hell and the loss of God.

There is a final difference, which is that the deadliest sins do not destroy faith, which remains at the bottom of the heart, ready to be the help and refuge of sinners; it is weakened, it is obscured, but it may shine forth again some day. In hell, also, faith is not lost, the devils believe in the beauty of the Creator, but it is to blaspheme Him; they believe in the Sacrifice on Calvary,

but only to insult it, they believe in the Sacrament of remission of sins, in the assistance of Mary, even more than do the Christians upon earth; but their faith only increases their despair. Oh! then, pray in these blessed hours, forget all else, believe, love Our Blessed Lord, reflect on His mercy; He does not wish you to be accursed and lost; refuse Him nothing; do not give yourself by halves, tear yourselves away from all that keeps you from Him. Pray to Mary, she will be your help, your refuge, your Mother; on this depends your eternity.

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE.

THE JUDGMENT.

WE come now to the judgments of God, those which He pronounces upon us when we leave this earth, and also the actual judgment which He is pronouncing upon our soul: for God judges us as He sees us; He observes us and penetrates us, therefore we may ask ourselves at every moment, what is God's judgment of us now? To do this practically, we must call to mind two things and some of their component parts: the final judgment, and the merciful judgment which God brings to bear upon us in the tribunal of Penance. Let us compare: when our soul appears before God, free, delivered from the shackles of the body, from illusions of earth, she will, in the Divine light, clearly perceive her state and her sins; what will then be the feelings of this soul? think of it seriously! what will be the feelings of the guilty soul, who has atoned for nothing, who has been cowardly and lukewarm, who bears the unpaid debt of her existence? Why, the pressure of a terrible

remorse, and of a just suffering, will be a weight under which she must crouch and submit. Then everything is present before her mind in its naked truth; sin is sin, weakness is weakness, vanity is vanity; and then her helplessness weighs upon her in an extraordinary degree! What will you? She is before the Face of the mighty living God, Who communicates the gift of fortitude by His Holy Spirit, and she is seized with strange terrors. Such will be the impressions, such the situation of this soul; reflect upon these things and make a salutary application of them to yourself, in fear of the punishment you may have to suffer.

And now, what have we here below? At the tribunal of Penance God is the Judge, He holds the balance of His justice; you, your thoughts and your actions, are weighed in the Divine balance, you are appreciated according to your worth.

Oh! ye souls, who do not examine yourselves, who do not judge yourselves, God judges you and condemns you; you are present to His thoughts; what is He going to ask of you? When you appear before the tribunal of Penance, what should be your disposition in which to receive the sentence of God by the mouth of His priest? is it terror of His judgments, a remorse and fear which leaves no space for hope? No, whatever be your faults and your weaknesses, when you cross the threshold of mercy where God judges you where He knows you

and awaits you at this very moment, you should be penetrated with a peaceful and confiding sorrow, a true and deep repentance, which shall descend into the recesses of your soul and be applied to all the faults of your life. In presence of the God Who desires to save you, whilst you recall to mind your infidelities, what I ask for, is not agitation, uneasiness or discouragement,—God disapproves of these dispositions,—what He wishes for, is grief and contrition, humility and confidence. Ah! try and understand this respective position of God and the soul! What a judge! . . . Never does He condemn upon earth: to the last breath of man, there is no reprobation for him. Here below, at God's tribunal, the sentence is all pardon, there is no other; woe betide the minister of God who should consider himself deputed to chastise. God wishes him to be a father to bless, but at the same time you must acknowledge your faultiness, you must not be deceived as to your state, your frivolity and your errors. If you were like unto the saints, you would seek for tears of blood, to shed them over the remembrances of your sins. Well then, ask for this real sorrow, it is one of the great graces of a retreat; hitherto have you asked sufficiently for grief and contrition?

Sorrow and lamentation are gifts of grace which we must solicit; what, will you not weep over your faults, your ingratitude, your weakness? can you not shed a tear in retracing the history of the years that are gone,

and over the sight of your Saviour hanging on the Cross? do you feel no pain? Pray then that you may have a fervent, sincere will to enter into the path of duty: and what sweetness and peace will fill your soul!

We have all need to be reminded of some of these painful moments in the past, which will be a joy for the rest of our life! Then what happiness! how freely we breathe, how we feel that this Paternal Judge was waiting to pardon us! woe to us if we remain cold, indifferent and insensible, without seeking to acquire true contrition! at least, let us desire that we may have it, and ask as did the prophet for the "desire of desire." Apply to yourself all the recollections evoked by the crucifix: ask yourself wherefore Jesus came, why He suffered, and what you have done for Him? By so doing we advance with confidence towards God's judgment, and we prepare ourselves for the blessed hour which will terminate a life spent in the happiest of dispositions. Picture to yourself a soul about to render her last breath, filled with these sentiments of regret and love, before her Judge: she has felt this grief, and though it had been but for an instant, she will appear tranquil and reassured at the judgment of her God; and then at the final sacrament of reconciliation, that soul will confess, and will acquit herself of the last burden of conscience, but not by a minute examination, by a detailed interrogation, no, with the rapidity of lightning she will appear before God, and in His

light all that is hidden will be manifested, as saith St. Paul. But all that has been repaired here below is effaced: as God Himself has told us, these sins are blotted out; He has cast them behind Him; but if there yet remain aught of the infidelities of every day, of the interests of this life which have been preferred before those of eternity, oh! then we shall see where we have been wanting, and must make our confession. On earth, to receive forgiveness, we must confess, like a child does, who opening his heart with all simplicity to his father, is judged only by his own words; the father who listens does not wish to accuse him, it is only needful that the soul should be unburthened, and nothing kept back. This costs bitterly sometimes, but remember that it is to avoid our having anything to carry to God's tribunal that it must be done. We must avoid being over scrupulous, being disturbed and going into endless details, but we must be sincere and trust in God. He demands only this. Contrition, if perfect, purifies the soul that is stained even before confession, if she has the intention of carrying her faults to the tribunal of Penance; and once the faults are washed in pure and true contrition, the confession of them is but a condition that has to be fulfilled.

In olden days, God said to His people, "when you shall have done penance, I will remember your sins no longer." Do you know that what causes the recurrence of faults, is the remembrance of the past? forget it, give

yourself up to grace, whatever be the number of your faults, whatever may have been the amount of reparation they entailed, after their confession you have no cause for disquietude: contrition wipes out the past, you are pure as a new-born infant. See and appreciate God: He has multiplied the proofs which are to give you confidence and establish you in His peace. Yes, we shall appear before His own tribunal; but there is another tribunal to which we may repair every day; go there then with this contrition, this confidence, and this faith, and you will receive a blessing.

When we have to appear in God's presence, unless our debt has been acquitted here below, we shall receive the sentence of the necessary reparations. Amongst you, there are certainly no souls destined for damnation, but there are some who are destined for satisfaction, and ah! you sometimes say: "Purgatory! I would that I might be certain of going there!" . . . You offend God by such language. God wishes to admit you to His Bosom, and to His glory, and you would consent to sleep on in your indolence, in your weakness, so as to suffer long years, perhaps centuries of torment? . . .

Here on earth, after mortal or venial sin, there is a debt to pay; but God has multiplied the means of expiation: the *Pater*, the sign of the Cross, the use of Holy Water; all these are means of making satisfaction to God; and then there are the treasures of the Church . . . in-

dulgences ! God has multiplied all these that you may free yourselves from the weight that you will have to bear for your forgiven sins ; but to do this, you must practise the spirit of penance, and learn to suffer and to humiliate yourselves. You complain of your griefs, of your contradictions, of your anxieties, of your trials, of the ingratitude of your children ; life is full of bitterness, and you repine that it is so. Look up on high, question your Judge and Father, He awaits you to judge you, and in His mercy, He afflicts you because He loves you. You are tempted to call Him a severe tyrant ; you weep, you lament ; but once again, He wishes you to acquit your debt, it is His Hand which purges and blesses you. Have you then never forgotten the goodness of God ? Have you never offended Him ? Have you nothing to reproach yourself with ? He knows your weakness, and that you would do nothing for Him of yourself if He left you in happiness and consolation. Learn then the inestimable price of your sufferings : they are the treasures of your life, the sign of your predestination, they are that which makes you resemble your great Model, and gives you a pledge that you will one day reach the throne of God.

Ah ! may this retreat serve to make us love our sufferings, our trials, our illnesses, our crosses ; let us say : "My God, Thy Will be done." I do not forbid you to weep, no, for the Divine Saviour also wept, and commanded woe to come unto Him ; He wished to taste of

anguish, disgust and tears; but pray as He prayed, ask for the accomplishment of His holy Will, and make an act of resignation before this altar in the spirit of penance, which cures the soul, and guarantees peace and glory to her.

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE.

ON LUKEWARMNESS.

WE are advancing far into our retreat, and in order to gain all the graces attached to these holy days, let us render to the Lord a tribute of praise and of love. It will be well for us to think over all the truths which may be most useful to us, and to point out a certain disease of the soul, which sometimes does not strike us as either grave or mortal, and yet which merits the most serious attention.

There is a certain lamentable disposition which is productive of the saddest results, and exposes us to the greatest dangers; it may be found in a regular, and, in the eyes of the world, a Christian life, and is lukewarmness. This sort of sickness weakens grace, although it does not actually destroy it. God has mentioned the malady by word and sign, so that we may recognize it, and examine how far we may be infected with it. There are many degrees in tepidity: together with it we may retain good and pious habits, at the same time with others that

are displeasing to God; we may feel reassured on points, when we ought to be anxious and fearful.

I wish to make you understand what this tepidity is, and the whole evil of it; I will describe its character and its symptoms, and then tell you what remedies may be applied.

As to the grievousness of this condition, it is enormous, and I have often been struck by passages of Scripture which refer to it, and the care and attention which the Saints and doctors of the soul have displayed in warning people against so fatal a disease. I give you a few instances. St. Thomas carefully defines lukewarmness; he calls it a certain disgust with well-doing, a disposition of the soul which causes the neglect of good works, an alienation from all which leads to God. In Isaias, this state is described as a species of slumber, as a weight which causes the eyes to close. This prophet adds in speaking of the lukewarm, "a book shall be given them to read, and they shall know no letters." This book is the Gospel, it is closed for them, they love it not, they comprehend it not! how miserable a state is theirs!

It is again depicted as the field of the idle labourer, in which grow nothing but thorns and brambles, which is open to all comers, which remains uncultivated and bears no fruit.

Again in another place, we find it spoken of as a land which has received the dews of heaven, but which they

cannot fertilize, because it is untilled. Of a surety, these examples ought to teach us. Thus, when we are in this state, we feel no attraction towards prayer, we pray or we do not pray, it is much the same thing; we communicate without fervour, we confess without contrition, we are not watchful, we seek not to cultivate our soul, we are indolent, and love naught but vain, futile things, reserving our activity for what is trivial and worldly; for the service of God we find nothing but languor, disgust, and enervation. Listen to what the Apostle St. John says, speaking for God: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth!" What, would it be better to be sinful, to be in sin which is death to the soul? Yes, give me rather a guilty soul, dead to grace, but having retained all her energy and strength; one day she may rise again to life! But this sickly soul, which does not recognize its condition, which is plunged in lethargy, which crawls to church and to prayer as to an intolerable fatigue, I pity her! All this voluntary laxity, this indifference, this contempt of virtues, is very, very serious!

I conclude that this soul has not mortally offended God, but she may be grievously sick for all that! You must distinguish between the two: a person may be very faithless, experience a disgust for prayer, and yet not be lukewarm. The difference is this: the lukewarm soul lets herself go, and sinks down into apathy, the other suffers

from her condition, and prays. The nature of this disease is to be insensible of it, is not to reproach oneself with it, is to be content with it as it is. This evil is very difficult to cure, and to rouse oneself requires great efforts: we drag ourselves along, and God is put off to the second rank, or to the third, or perhaps to the tenth! And supposing this soul were to die, sunk in heaviness and sleep, what will be her awakening before the sovereign Judge? Ah! shake off this weight, examine yourselves seriously; you may be lukewarm in everything, or only in some things.

The better to distinguish this state, let us look for its symptoms. St. Bernard speaks very severely of this evil thing, lukewarmness; here is what he wrote to his monks: "Even in the cloister we sometimes meet with weak men, who are bent under their burthen, dragging their lives along without any compunction of heart, upon whom the rule weighs heavily, who delight only in idle conversations, who can never remain quietly in their cells, but spread themselves abroad like water that is poured out, and who have no thoughts but earthly, sensible ones." This language is severe. But there are elsewhere besides in the cloister, souls bent under the same burden, who love futile and frivolous conversation, who cannot recollect themselves, whose thoughts are all of earth,—assuredly these are not the fervent souls,—they seek those that resemble themselves, and a wretched association it is.

The positive, fundamental sign of this condition is, voluntary negligence in prayer, and the forsaking of all meditation and reflection. The sacraments are approached irregularly and without any desire of God by such persons; they are led by every passing impression, can never stay at home, but must be always going and coming; ill at ease with themselves, afraid of self and afraid of God! How is it that a soul which is crowned with God's graces, which has tasted the gift of piety, which has walked in His commandments, can fall into idleness and languor? It is because she has allowed her nights to prolong themselves far into the day, and the morning's awakening is unknown to her. She prays, when the day is already far advanced, without heart and without devotion, and this is all she has to offer to her Lord. What! this soul has once tasted of the love of Jesus, and she has stopped short in the road? Alas, she no longer hastens on in the way of her Lord's commands, but gives herself up to vanities, and to worldly follies. She forsakes the house of God. If she appears there, it is to fulfil a strict duty, and then only at the very last moment, without prayer, without reading, without reflection. Oh! what danger is there here of being lost! Do you then know exactly the boundary of mortal sin? do you realize the horror of this condition which offends God, and brings forth the most lamentable results?

What are the remedies for this sorrowful state? Let

us search for them, for all souls require to be fore-armed against relaxation.

Everywhere around us we meet with incessant occasions of sin ; and what we have to do, is to embrace the exercise of prayer with vigour and energy ; to pray in spite of ourselves, whatever disgust we experience, always to pray, and we shall be heard. We must think about things that have to do with God, we must reflect and meditate, here is our remedy. Can you not give one little quarter of an hour to thoughts of God, to meditations upon Him? You must submit to this restraint: you understand how to give to your body the care it requires, how to humour your caprices, how to occupy yourself with your own ailments! Is one quarter of an hour a-day too much to give to God? You find your book wearisome, open the book and keep it open ; stay quiet with it, think, reflect ; salvation is promised to the soul who makes a quarter of an hour's meditation every day. You say to me : but what am I to fix upon? what am I to think about? Have you then no fault, no defect of character? nothing to examine yourself in, nothing to accomplish? Ah! your soul is indeed the untended vine, the uncultivated field! . . . Take one of your faults, and examine it, strive to cure your vanity, your idleness, think over your difficulties and try seriously to conquer yourself. You must frequent the sacraments ; well-prepared communions and good confessions are powerful remedies :

and then you must avoid intimate relationships with persons who are lukewarm and lead careless lives, whilst at the same time you keep within the limits of social courtesy; but for your friends, those with whom you are intimate, choose those souls which are truly Christian, pious and fervent, seek their society, and you will derive much good therefrom. Be free from all human respect, do not be afraid of passing for a devotee; avoid those worldly gossipings which hinder your mind from finding savour in spiritual subjects. Talk cheerfully, freely, but beware of making your neighbour the topic of conversation; keep a watch over your tongue and your heart, and you will gain renewed strength, and will find an abundance of Divine graces and consolations.

Finally, one remedy against lukewarmness, is this very retreat; I do not wish these days to be as other days; they must change you, make you better, bring you to God. Pray; and above all, pray to Mary, address yourself to her as to a mother's heart, and then you will experience once more those joys and that fervour which are a foretaste of heaven.

SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

WE must embrace with eagerness all that gives us a better knowledge of God and of our relations with Him : we do not sufficiently understand the sentiments of His Heart with regard to our souls, we do not take them enough into consideration, and if we did but remember them as God wishes us to remember them, we should walk more faithfully in the path of His commandments. There are a multitude of touching passages in the Scriptures, which ought to teach us the goodness of God towards ourselves, as for instance, the metaphor of the Good Shepherd, the parable of the woman who lost a groat, and that of the father of the prodigal son ; these metaphors are all realities ; you may read about them in the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke. Read them all ; for to know Our Lord, to understand His feelings with regard to our souls, whatever be the burthen of our sins, we must consider Him, first of all as the Good Shepherd, when immediately the thought presents

itself of the joy this Good Shepherd felt when He found His lost sheep. The shepherd has a flock, he knows every one of his sheep, he calls them by name, he gives them every care, he preserves them from dangers, he guards them, feeds them, and leads them to refreshing streams where they may quench their thirst. He does everything which can conduce to the preservation of their life, strength, and beauty; but when danger approaches, when the wolf draws near, then does the shepherd indeed defend his sheep; he fights valiantly, and when he has gained the victory he celebrates it with songs of triumph. This allegory is intended to represent to you the feelings and action of God with regard to your soul. Yes; God defends, watches over and surrounds us with His angels who protect us during every moment of our lives.

The inspirations of grace and light which we receive, thoughts of faith, good wishes, these constitute the care of the Shepherd; He surrounds us with proofs of His vigilance, and nourishes us with the bread of life. God knows all our wants, and if He provides food for the birds of heaven, and clothes the flowers of the field, what will He not do for us? He guards our souls, He fights for them.

Oh you wavering and suspicious soul! Have you not one day trembled for your life, as did the sheep of the Shepherd? You have strayed far from His vigilant eye, but He has hastened in pursuit of you through thorns and

briars; He toiled up the steep ascent, and found you at last, and then He gathered you up in His arms, and brought you back to the fold in spite of yourself; whilst He, this Divine Pastor, Who thus thought of you, celebrated His joy in songs of triumph and bade the angels of heaven sing for very gladness because a soul was saved!

Is it not written in the gospel: "Even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance?" See what goodness, what indulgence are His; when the Saviour shed His blood, bent under the weight of the Cross, He fought for you, and when He died, it was because He had conquered! Look at this Heart, all ye weak, timid and lukewarm souls, it is that of the Good Shepherd: He wishes to carry you still, to gather you into His fold: He has suffered so much for you, you owe Him this joy: do you then be henceforth docile sheep to Him.

Read this chapter of St. Luke once again, and observe this woman who possessed a little treasure and naturally enough valued it. She loses one groat, and therefore lights a candle, sweeps the house, and searches diligently, and then how pleased she is when the little piece of silver shines before her eyes! She calls together her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her, and the Saviour tells us: "So I say to you, there shall be joy before the

angels of God upon one sinner doing penance, more than upon ninety and nine just who need not penance." Ah! Jesus, Thou also hast sought after this groat which was lost, and makest answer to us: "Oh! my child, I had graven mine own likeness upon thy heart. Alas! one day, it was disfigured, obliterated, lost; then I sought, I exhausted every means to recover it, and at last, when it reappeared again, oh! then did I celebrate my joy in heaven, with all the choirs of angels."

Supposing a lover of art were to discover amongst a number of daubs and sketches, one painting stamped with the mark of genius, what happiness for him! . . . He seizes his treasure, hides it, cleans it, repairs it, and then when a beautiful picture discloses itself, how grandly he frames it, how proud he is to display it! What is all this, compared with the Divine Image which is placed in our hearts? Ah! when we can say that this picture of God is faithfully reproduced in our souls, what joys are added unto His!

The joy of the father in the parable is also typical of God. A father had two sons: the younger, carried away by the violence of his passions, demands the portion of his inheritance; the father gives it to him with regret, and the senseless youth goes away into a far country, where he soon wastes all he has in debauchery and pleasure, and is reduced to utter want. Abandoned by his friends, left to himself, he sees his own degradation, whilst

forced to herd with swine, and to envy the husks which they are eating whilst he is starving of hunger. Then, returning to himself, overwhelmed with grief, he profits by the punishment he has undergone . . . there is a sadness unto death which is despair; but there is another which gives life, and which is repentance . . . he repents, arises, and hastens to his father, clothed in rags, and covered with the livery of vice; the father sees him from afar, his tenderness recognizes him, and running to meet him, he falls upon his neck, embraces him, presses him to his breast, and brings him in triumph to the paternal roof, saying to the servants: "Hasten, bring hither the fatted calf, the best robe, and a ring for his finger, and let us eat and make merry." Such is the joy of the father, can we imagine anything sweeter? And the Saviour repeats to us: "There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."

Such is the God whom you serve: God is a father, and there is no father like Him; He creates, He brings forth into life, He gives life to the soul, He supports it, and gives us beforehand our share of inheritance; the mind, the heart, faith, the consolations of virtue, the fervours of piety, He has given us them all; even when we forsake Him, when we turn away from Him, when we insult Him, He is the father still; and when the soul is all defaced by sin, when nothing remains of her primary inno-

cence, He is yet and always our Father! The world may abandon, despise, and forget this guilty soul, but God, never! He has said by the mouth of His prophet: "A woman may forget her infant, yet will not I forget thee."

Such is the goodness of that God, to Whom we give the lowest place in our hearts! The Saviour said: "I am not come to save the just, but to save sinners." And see how He pardons Magdalen, and the adulterous woman, and how He reproves the severity of His disciples! "What," you say, "does He prefer the soul which has sinned against Him?" Listen to the father's reply to the elder brother, who is jealous of the prodigal son: "This thy brother was dead, and is come to life again, was lost and is found. Thou, my son, art always with me, and all that I have is thine." Ah! then, sinners, do not despair, but persevere; and ye just souls, adhere faithfully to the path of innocence you have hitherto trodden: God loves you, He cherishes you, you are the chosen of the flock; but I charge you never to repulse the soul who returns to the fold; forgive as God forgives.

Thus you have seen the joy of the father, of the master, of the shepherd, and you know what are God's feelings towards you. Banish then, every fear, every painful doubt, be full of confidence and trust, but be

generous and resolute in following the way of grace and fervour.

As a mother, God has given you Mary, invoke her and you will receive these sentiments of love and confidence which befit the children of God.

SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE.

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST.

THE Apostles put the following question to the Divine Saviour: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" and they answered themselves: "Thou alone hast the words of eternal life." We ought to ask ourselves the same question: "To whom shall we go? To whom shall we give our hearts and minds? Whom shall we ask for what we want? Where shall we gain light and strength? Where seek consolation? How shall we satisfy the desires of our soul?"

Assuredly it is to Jesus Christ we must go; it is He Whom the Father loved, by Whom we may be saved, and Whose Heart belongeth to us. Jesus Christ then offers Himself to you at this moment, and I would that in faith you might feel the nearness of His adorable Person. Do you hear Him in Judea, preaching forth the words of eternal life? Do you see Him in His humility, poverty, and kindness? Do you listen to Him saying: "I am the way, the truth, the life;"? the way to lead you,

the truth to enlighten you, the life that you should possess.

The Holy Ghost has said: "I am the truth," and He has made known to our hearts this truth which is Himself, therefore it is in Him that we must believe; it is to Him that we should refer in all things, and not to ourselves or to the reasonings and opinions of men.

"I am the truth!" What must I do, Lord? "Come and follow Me." And we must say with the Apostles: "To whom shall we go? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life! It is truth, the wisdom of God which calls me to follow Him."

You must make up your mind not to refuse Jesus Christ. His Voice is speaking to you, His Heart is urging you. Ah! this appeal to follow Jesus, is our vocation, is the foundation of all our duties; it is sovereignly just; to God alone does it belong to call a soul, to dispose of a heart and will. Jesus traces out your path, He asks you to tread in the footprints which He has left. Has He not the right to do so? Is it not He Who has crowned you with blessings, Who has conquered the world by His blood in order to deliver you? It is supreme justice, it is of strictest obligation to follow Jesus Christ. It is also a necessity for you. Ah! you may rock yourselves to sleep with the vanities of the world, and refuse to follow your Chief; but if you do not follow Him in life, you will follow Him in death, and He will appear one

day, with the Cross in His Hand, to judge you. You may waver and grovel in your indecision, you may lead a life that is half Christian, half worldly, whilst you pay a miserable tribute to things created ; but there will come a day, when the Hand of God will be laid upon you ! . . . What then can be happier than to respond now to this appeal ?

" I am the light of the world," says Jesus Christ, " whosoever believeth in Me may not remain in darkness." Do you wish your soul to be in darkness ? For a soul who follows Jesus Christ, who attaches herself to His footsteps, cost what it may, there is peace and consolation ; far from Him, far from His light, there is no true repose ; His appeal is that of the king, of the good shepherd, of the master, and He has deigned to tell you that in responding to it you will cause Him to feel the sweetest of joys.

Jesus added : " I am the way, to guide you ;" strange mystery of the mercy and love of a God ! Had we possessed the Sacred Scriptures only, or the words of the ministers of the Gospel, much would have been wanting to us ; and it is for this reason that God wished that there shall be a whole life, lived by His Son, so that not a single circumstance, not a single example should be wanting for us.

Do you wish to know what your home life should be like ? Contemplate the Holy Family of Nazareth : Jesus

grows in years, in graces, and in wisdom, is submissive to His parents, respectful towards Joseph and Mary. Now, return to your homes, and you will have no difficulty in understanding your duties to your families, to faith, to prayer, to that peace and unity which sanctify all things. In your trials, contradictions, and sufferings, do you require an example? See Jesus, Who had not where to rest His head, Who was calumniated and despised; look at this King, this God, and then dare to murmur! Nay, rather, pray to Him, and soon consolation will flow into your soul, together with faith and humility! Do you desire to accomplish one last sacrifice for the work of your salvation? Well, then, follow the way of the Cross, mount up to Calvary, go up with Mary and the holy women, go on and on, falter not till you reach the summit, till you reach the Cross itself; contemplate the Saviour Who is bound to it, Who is raised aloft upon it, Who is dying upon it for you! Will you then say to God, that He is not worthy of your sacrifice, that you choose to live for your whims and vain caprices only? Will you retain your emotion and sensibility for lying fables, for fictitious stories unworthy of your attention, and remain cold before your Saviour delivered over unto torture and ignominy? Ah! you know not how to love! We are all, with regard to God, cold and insensible; it is as though God had never come upon this earth, had never spoken nor suffered! . . .

He said also: "I am the life." What does this mean? It is a God who speaks, and He speaks of this life which He wishes to communicate to our souls. What is this Divine life, which descends into the very bottom of our hearts?

There was once a day, upon which we received the gift of existence from our parents, when it was said: "there is one man the more in the world." Now was that life? No, it was death, for when born we are the children of sin and of death. What then is this life? It is grace which regenerates, which elevates the soul, and bears it step by step to the possession of the Divine beatitude. By grace we are made veritable children of God; and then between God and our soul there passes a something which ought to excite our admiration and love; and God gives us this life that we may preserve it, and gain more and more of it until the end. This grace anticipates all our wants, accompanies us from earliest dawn, gives us all the light, strength, and assistance of which we have need for the remainder of the day, and if Jesus Christ has said to His Church, "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," He has said it equally to the faithful soul. He leads us, He accompanies us, He preserves us in all the various actions by which we fulfil our duties of every kind: it is a grace ever abiding in the depths of our heart.

This is what is forgotten so sadly, what is stifled, what

is darkened, what is sometimes extinguished. Is your life so? Alas! your worldly thoughts, the multiplicity of your vanities, your natural, human efforts, these counsels sought amid the influences of the earth and the world, are not the life of grace; you refuse and reject the interior grace within your heart, you know not how to find God in a tranquil prayer, enthroned within your soul! Ah! sometimes you have followed and listened to this Voice! What peace there is when God communicates Himself to a listening, attentive soul, when He inspires her with resignation, courage, and the gift of sacrifice! A devout soul knows this inward peace.

We often hear a very un-Christian saying repeated in the world, which signifies that if one does not do one's duty, it is that God has not given one the grace to do it: now this is a lie; God never forsakes a friend: it is your frivolities, your terrestrial preoccupations which darken the light of grace. Ah, yes! God pursues you, He never forgets His promises, and like the prodigal's father, He has pardon and mercy in store for you. Let us all respond to God's pursuit of us. You have never yet done enough for Him; you pray badly, you make your meditation badly. And you, who do not come to the sacraments, who receive them without preparation, God calls you too; come! He is in pursuit of you, seek Him since He seeks you, and you will receive this life! If there is one here amongst you, who has tarried on the

road, if there is one who is faint under the burden of duty, God desires to dwell within you, come back to Him; has He not said, "I am the life; I am the light, have confidence, for I have overcome the world?"

Do you not wish to listen to all these words, and to receive that portion of the Divine life which has been prepared for you? We all must act, whether for good or ill; and the only good things are to be found in Jesus Christ; away from Him there is nothing but indigence and misery; pray to Him then! We have but one day more, in which to thank Him together; open your hearts wide and God will pour therein the blessings of His choice, truth and life; open them wide, I say, and you will tread in the path which leads to eternal life.

EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE.

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST.

YOU have heard the voice of Jesus calling you, you are determined to follow the Divine path which He has traced for you, and to maintain an inviolable fidelity to His Heart. God watches you, penetrates your soul, and gladly fortifies your generous determination, of this be assured; and therefore there remains but little more for me to say, and I might leave you to yourselves, and to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; and yet, I must say something more about your Divine Chief, and endeavour to lead you nearer and nearer to His Spirit, and to the fulfilment of His wishes.

What then is this Spirit of Jesus, this life which goes on (or ought to go on) within our soul, and ought to be the mainspring of our thoughts and of our affections? What is it that the Divine Saviour wished to show by His teachings and examples? What were the wishes He expressed? I listen to His words, I meditate upon His Gospel, I prostrate myself before Him, and it seems to

me, that I hear it resounding on every side, incessantly, that His life, His nourishment, and His Will, were to accomplish in all things the Will of His Father. He said, "I seek not my own glory; I seek the glory of Him who hath sent me." When the Apostles wished to dissuade Him from dwelling on the outrages which awaited Him, He said: "My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent me, and to perfect His work."

Thus, in order to sum up within yourselves, what you must do to follow Jesus Christ and to practise His doctrine, you must say: "I will accomplish the Will of God, for this is what my Divine Saviour requires of me."

Two things are comprised in the fulfilment of this duty, the glory of the Lord, and true humility, which is, in itself, complete submission to God. Therefore, in order to profit well by the graces of this retreat, and to gather all its fruits, you must penetrate your heart and mind with resignation to God, to His Will, and to His commands; there alone is life. You must not stop short at the theory, but go on to the practice, you must pray much, and ask Mary to place you under the guidance of her Son.

Consequently, wherever you see God's laws infringed by mortal or even venial sin, wherever you perceive disobedience and a want of honour and reverence, you must say to yourself that you would rather die a thousand times over, than fall into similar ways. We say this to God sometimes, but do we always abide in these veritable sen-

timents of faith, in this conviction, in this horror of sin, as deep as that of death? Prayer and faith are sometimes necessary for the obtaining of these dispositions; neither reasoning nor our own efforts will suffice, but we must pray constantly to possess this spirit of humble submission, and of dependence upon God's Will.

That is the first step, but there is one other. In order to avoid sin, to preserve purity of soul, and to be constant in grace, we must again interrogate the Spirit of Jesus Christ. What did He wish and desire for us with tears, what did He ask of His Father for mankind? I can fancy I hear Him say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and He indeed was poor in this wise even unto the most real and the most entire detachment. You are possessed of abundant riches; it is right that you should keep and make use of them; but do not set your heart upon them; there is another treasure, another greatness, and when you feel tempted to succumb to the fascination and pomp of these riches, interrogate the Heart of Jesus yourselves, recall to mind His words, and His example, and see how God values these things; ask that you may think as He thought, that the illumination of faith may come into your heart, and that your soul may remain free in the midst of these seductions.

Jesus was rich also: He might have been born amidst the courts and splendours of the world, but no! He chose to be born in a manger, to live poor and despised,

to die upon a cross! This other step, then, is interior detachment, is to have the heart free. What! shall this soul which Jesus purchased be filled with solicitude and care for the body, and neglect her salvation? Know then that whether your lot be cast in wealth or in poverty, amid honours or opprobrium, you must follow Jesus Christ. The soul is then peaceful and strong, she rises above all hazards, all revolutions, all misfortunes, and she would be calm in any crisis, were she not surrounded by loved ones who may have to suffer.

This is not all; in this spirit of resignation to the Divine Will, in this Christian detachment, there is something still higher and well worthy of a generous heart; it is when during an attentive study of the life and death of Jesus Christ, we feel ourselves penetrated with a true love of Him! Who else has a greater right to this love of our soul? . . . When I ask myself the question, what Jesus loved, what He chose, what He preferred, for what purpose He came upon the earth, I am obliged to confess that He came to humiliate Himself and to suffer, that He preferred ignominy to glory, that he chose outrage, poverty, sacrifice and death. This was His sole Will upon this earth. And it was all for you, who were to forget Him, to refuse to know Him or to love Him! When we think of these things in prayer, what answer can we make? If a soul in presence of this life and of this death of the Saviour remains divided between the spirit of the

world and the spirit of the Gospel, is it not as much as to say to Him, "Ah! it was very well for Thee, Lord, but not for me. What suits and pleases me, is what flatters my vanity, namely, riches, and luxury, and the esteem of men. I cannot endure misfortunes, insults, and sacrifices; no, I cannot bear them!" You do not say that in so many words, you do not exactly think it, but does not your life say so, instead of your lips? Ah! let us humble ourselves! Might not Bourdaloue say now to you, what he once asked a fashionable assembly—"Ah if we had a Saviour who was rich, and resplendent with pomp and grandeur, should you have anything to alter in your existence?" Might he not now add, "Is there nothing you can change in your lives for Him who loved you so much?" You need do nothing extraordinary, only pray, consult with yourselves and seek what you can put in practice in your lives in order to resemble your Saviour. To do this, it is not necessary for you to leave your homes, nor to do any striking actions, but in everything, you must look upon the Heart of Jesus and unite your actions with His. Yes, Christian perfection is possible in the world and you may all aspire to the faithful imitation of the virtues of Jesus Christ. Withdraw into the silence of your own hearts, learn what grace solicits from you, and beg of Jesus to give you the holy liberty of the children of God, and He will grant your prayer.

NINETEENTH CONFERENCE.

TO CHOOSE AND TO WILL.

AT the close of a retreat, there is a choice to be made. You must choose, and you must will: making in peace and confidence that interior choice of what you mean to give to God, whilst, guided by His light and grace, you try to read His workings within your hearts.

You, all of you, have the wish to live in conformity with God's law: may your lives be Christian and pure, may there be no clashing of your will with God's Will: may yours be sincere, holy and upright, and then you will have confidence and peace, whilst all that carries you onwards towards God, to the complete forgetfulness of what you have left behind, will be the action of God. You must start from this point: what you discover within you bearing the mark of this grace will give you freedom, it is the good fruit and a blessing from your retreat which you must cherish faithfully. Your heart has need of liberty, of joy, and of hope; you must encourage these dispositions, not

because you can ever count upon yourself, since you are weak and feeble; but you must forget your past inconstancy, hope in God, count upon Him and go forwards; then you may be sure that the Spirit and the grace of God are inspiring you.

The hurtful disposition is that which argues, vacillates and grows discouraged; it troubles and disquiets others, leads them to despair, and its voice is often mistaken for that of truth. Now God wishes that you should hope in spite of yourselves and that you should be confident of His grace; therefore put aside all that disturbs you, pray and abandon yourselves to God; for this is the one thing needful. Supposing you were to come and say to me: "I wish to offend God, to rebel against His law," oh! then the devil would never torment you, for you would be his friend! God gives peace; the devil gives uneasiness. Now then, which will you choose, what will you do, what will you decide? The perfection of virtue does not lie in extraordinary paths. The Blessed Virgin led a poor and ordinary life; but because her heart, her prayers, her humility and patience created within her the most sublime holiness, hers was the purest and most privileged soul that ever existed.

God does not expect so much of you; learn to understand what He appoints for you to do, and in the fulfilment of your every day duties, take His part, range yourselves upon the side of our Lord Jesus Christ, determining

to imitate His example; such is the end for which we were created; we must embrace the Cross, listen to the Gospel, lay on one side the thousands of temptations which the spirit of evil would throw in our way, and make a sincere resolution of following Jesus. For this you must pray. To pray, my children, is to will, for we can do nothing of ourselves, we must persevere in prayer, which is the light of the heart, and after having prayed, we must make firm resolutions; we must say, "I will forget myself, I will throw my whole self into prayer and into the Heart of Jesus." This is simple enough, and requires neither great efforts nor austerities, &c. It is enough to pray and to lean upon God; has He not testified His goodness over and over again to you? You have, each one of you, different needs, different virtues to acquire, different faults to overcome.

All hearts are not alike, however sincere and devoted they may be; but one thing is alike for all souls, the necessity of the warfare against self, which is an endless work. We must accustom ourselves to fresh returns of our nature, either under the form of tepidity or impetuosity, vanities or caprices; but we must conquer, and if you let your bark float without helm or rudder, whither will your graces and your life go? Instead of which, if every morning, as truly Christian women, you recall to mind the resolutions you made when in retreat, and choose some subject for self-examination—for instance, your irritability, impa-

tience, languor, or self-indulgence—you will discover the obstacle, and you will say: "I will pray, I will strive, and if I fall, I will raise myself again." This is the practice of the spiritual warfare: there is no rest upon this earth, we must be always at war. In what sense then must we fight?

To find this out, you must place yourselves face to face with the great truths of life, and turn your thoughts to that hour which will be your last, and ask yourselves, what resolutions you will then wish you had made at the close of this retreat; seek for them this evening, before you give yourselves to sleep, which is the image of death, picture to yourselves that final hour which will strike for you, place yourselves in presence of the Sovereign Judge, of this Saviour Who has suffered for us, and Who will judge us, singly as we stand. "What shall I wish then that I had resolved? What sacrifice shall I wish that I had made?" Choose what you would desire for the souls who are dear to you, and apply to yourselves the advice that you would give to others. You are perhaps a wife, a mother, and mistress of a household, do you preside in a Christian spirit over the education of your children? You ought to seek to inspire them with the love of faith, to keep them from all that might sully the purity of their souls, and not leave them to mercenary hands. Watch then over your children, their teachers, and your servants, not with fidgetiness or con-

straint, but with sweetness and kindness, giving them not merely an example, but good counsel, and at the approach of Easter, say a word about confession to them now and then. You cannot be entirely responsible for these souls, but they are confided to your care.

Do you fulfil all these duties properly? And when with your husband, are you always patient and forbearing? St. Paul said that patience was the most necessary of virtues. Examine yourself, and if you are now placed in the midst of trials and difficulties, bow your head, and humble yourself, for by so doing, you shall have peace. In your relationships with the world, and in your conversations, do charity and Christian modesty always preside? can you say, in conscience, that you could not do better than you are doing? Why should not your language be always reserved, charitable, and modest? Ah! let these many tongues, sometimes so flippant and sometimes so severe upon their neighbour, talk as they will, their language must not be yours, for Jesus Christ bids us love one another, and our enemies likewise.

Then as regards your alms-deeds and works of charity to the poor, could you not do more good than you do, and do it better? Have you all some charitable occupation in hand? If your days are spent in idleness, and filled with frivolities, habits of luxury, of vanity, and caprice, with which you squander away the best part of your possessions, when there are so many poor in want

tell me, could you not do better? But above all, be constant in prayer; woe unto you if you mean to neglect it, and to forsake your habits of meditation and recollection. No! you will offer each day to God, and give Him a faithful tribute, you will pray, be always praying, and God will bestow on you His most abundant blessings.

TWENTIETH CONFERENCE.

ON A MASS OF GENERAL COMMUNION.

ILL you not now, in these precious moments, unite yourselves with the spirit of the Annunciation? Will you not transport your hearts to the holy dwelling of Nazareth where this mystery is being accomplished, and ask for some participation in the graces which your immaculate Mother received, and pray that you may experience some few of the sentiments with which her heart was filled to overflowing? Yes, I desire earnestly for you, that deep and peaceful spring of joy which welled up in her heart, for it is the disposition of all others the most acceptable to the Heart of Jesus. Rejoice then in the contemplation of this mystery, and cast on one side all subjects of anxiety or sadness. Look at the Virgin Mary, as she kneels in silence and recollection in her little oratory: she receives the heavenly messenger, and hears the language of praise and of respect; he salutes Mary, who is troubled at the announcement of the mystery which is to be accomplished in her;

she thinks of her virginity, which is dearer to her than the incredible favour which is promised her; but, reassured by the Divine messenger, she humbles herself, prostrates herself before the Will of the Most High, and consents to maternity and to this union between the Son of God and one of His creatures.

1stly. The joy of humility in the Blessed Eucharist. May this be yours, my children! Mary abases herself, and acknowledges herself unworthy of the favours of the Lord, she knows that none of these gifts are hers by right, and that she owes them to the liberal generosity of God, and to the Heart of His Son. Thus does the humble soul rejoice, when receiving Jesus Christ in holy Communion. Rejecting far from her all thoughts of pride, "Lord," she says, "I possess nothing but what Thou hast given me. I give thanks to Thee for Thy bounties; all is Thine, my life, and my heart; I have received everything from Thy mercy! could earth offer me aught that can be compared with this repose of my spirit in Thee? I will love and esteem naught but what will render me worthy of Thee."

May you experience this humble joy, my children, this repose of spirit in God through participation in the Divine Eucharist! Learn then, once for all, to commit yourselves entirely into the hands of God, to abandon yourselves to Him from Whom you receive all, to offer yourselves without reserve to Him Who gives Himself to you.

2ndly. To the joy of humility, you must unite the joy of gratitude and love: Mary tasted this also. Mary would never have sought after this intimate alliance of the Divine with the human nature of a creature, and would have renounced it, had her refusal been a proof of yet more ardent love.

The Son of God is incarnate in her bosom, lives there hidden, and is nourished of her substance: see whether it be possible sufficiently to estimate the greatness of Mary, and to have enough confidence in her power? Mary recognizes her unworthiness, annihilates herself in the contemplation of the mystery being operated within her, and this soul, the tenderest that ever existed, feels only the need of offering, of giving herself to God. What attachment was there in Mary to the things of earth? Assuredly none whatever: one single feeling filled her soul, that of gratitude. Now, recall to your minds in the silence and recollection of prayer, the innumerable benefits, the signal favours with which God has overwhelmed you; with what care has He not drawn you towards Himself? and when you had strayed away the farthest, did He ever abandon you? did he ever cease to sustain you, did He ever refuse you His support? Ah! on this day at least, when we celebrate the mystery of His Divine Incarnation, which He renews mystically in each of you, in your communions; at this moment, when you are about to receive your God, Who has for-

gotten all, effaced all, at this moment when you are going to possess Him in peace, what have you to offer to Him? He asks for nothing but love and confidence.

Banish all your past uneasinesses, and if the remembrance of the trials you have endured causes you to tremble for the future, put away from you apprehension; God loves you, cherishes you: have no fear; be happy, reconciliation is guaranteed you more securely than ever.

What! will you not share in our joy, when God wishes you to rejoice with Him? Ah! may the holy joy of peace, charity, and confidence fill our hearts!

Such is the disposition which God expects of you on this day. Go to Him with the loving confidence of a child, drink deeply at this Divine source, hasten towards the Saviour, Who, if He calls you to partake in His sufferings upon earth, wishes also that you should reign with Him in His glory.

Once more, rejoice with Mary, who, seeing in this mystery the beginning of the grand reparation due to the Divine justice irritated against mankind, accepted a reparation which was to rend her heart, and rejoiced in the thought of the graces, which the accomplishment of God's Will should shed upon the earth.

Beg of the Lord to give you the spirit of peace, open your hearts to Him, come to Him with joy, humility, and gratitude. Pray for each other, pray for those

dearest and nearest to you, pray that you may retain in your hearts the fruits of this retreat. Pray; for this is the time to ask for everything, good gifts for now and for eternity.

TWENTY-FIRST CONFERENCE.

END OF THE RETREAT.

EVEN upon earth, my children, there are some few happy days, some few moments granted by Providence in this vale of tears, to console hearts, and to restore their exhausted strength. Were it requisite to give you yet another proof of the ever watchful goodness of our God, we might call to witness these days, so swiftly flown, in which your piety, witnessed by God and the angels, has been a consolation to the Church.

Like unto that earthly mother, who forgot her sorrow when God restored to her, in full vigour, a son whom she thought was for ever torn from her arms, so the Church who receives innumerable wounds at the hands of her children, loses the recollection of her misfortunes, when she beholds devout and fervent hearts pressing around the holy Table: she has not had far to seek for you, dear children, for you were under her shelter, but new graces have been added to those you had already

received, and you have shown what courage can attain unto, during these days, the close of which I cannot witness without regret.

I have but one word to say, and that word should be for ever new life and consolation to your souls: this blessed word, this the fruits of your retreat is, a change of heart. My children, you must strive that the future days after this retreat, may never resemble in aught any past days, in which there has been cause of regret. You have entered upon a path of regeneration and of life, you have heard the most earnest invitations of grace. God has called you to an interior renovation, will you not respond to His appeal? Send, oh Lord, Thy Holy Spirit that It may renew the face of the earth! St. Paul tells us that he sought for strength in renewed devotion. We, too, must desire this happy change, wish for it in all its consequences, make every effort to obtain it.

God invites us, by His prophet, to celebrate in songs of praise, His magnificence in the resurrection of Nature: "For winter is now past, and the rain is over and gone, the flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come." Celebrate then the goodness of the Lord: there is for you also, my children, a new life, a new spring; your youth must be renewed like the eagles, so as to praise the splendour of the heavens.

You should then, in the deep determination of your soul, attach yourselves to renewed principles of fidelity.

How are the old resolutions of your hearts to serve as spiritual refreshment? No, there must be none of the past, no old habits; all must be fresh; God has created a new earth and new heavens for you. The grace of God which you have received so abundantly, must produce both fruit and flowers. Strength and life are renewed within your souls, let their effects be visible in your exterior.

Yes, you must change, be ever changing, so as to do better, to think better, to talk better, to conquer self better, to endure trial better, to hope always. This inspiration of grace must never leave your hearts, you cannot ever doubt of Divine mercy after the experience you have had of it.

What, you will succumb again to your weakness, you will fall again into languor! you will allow sadness and discouragement to reign in your soul, and will permit the recollection of past faults to outweigh the remembrance of the blessings of God? No, no, my children, you must have a strong will, and make veritable progress, you must persevere in prayer, and force an entry into our Saviour's Heart. He loves to be importuned, and even represents Himself as knocking at the door of your hearts and calling you.

Alas! does not the cause of our deceptions, of our mistakes, of our falls, spring from neglect of prayer and want of confidence in God, through trusting in our own strength?

We must be determined to change, my children, but we must consent that our change be apparent to others. I am not going to insist upon a reformation, for I know your active piety, nevertheless I believe that there is room for amelioration with all of you. Do not seek to hide what you are; if there be any contradiction between your faith and your lives, if there exist opposition and warfare between your principles and your actions, you must bring the latter into subjection to the former, simply and without affectation; you must be what you ought to be; and show, and say by your conduct: I am a Christian.

Ah! if you were all united together in one mind, if you were all animated with the desire of being consistent with yourselves, how much good you would do, what results you might obtain, how many evil plans would be shipwrecked like a vessel against a rock! You would witness, without taking part in that tumult which leads away from God, and draws so many lives out of their rightful road. Ah! if you were to let yourselves be seen thus transformed, if you were to consent thereto without regard to human respect, what an influence you might exert! only think of it! . . . And what harm can you see in doing so? must these words of the Gospel be applied to you "He that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of Man shall be ashamed, when he shall come in His majesty and that of His Father, and of the holy angels?"

Oh ! Christian souls, will you then not dare to implant the banner of your Saviour upon your foreheads ? Will you not testify to your faith by your patience and humility ? will you not confess openly that Jesus is the king of your hearts ?

A soul illuminated by God and penetrated with His love will understand what I say, and even if she have to endure persecution and sufferings for righteousness sake, God will know how to reward her by the abundance of peace, joy, and consolation, with which He will inundate her heart. Ah ! how far behind do these sweetnesses leave the pleasures of earth ! No, you do not understand the joys of sacrifice and of the immolation of one's whole being to God ; you ignore the recompense awarded to the faithful soul before whom the angels come down from heaven to prepare a magnificent repast.

To this resolution of changing, you must join the determination so worthy of generous souls, to show yourselves resolved to make profession of this Christian spirit in your manners and habits, and in the just use you make of your possessions. Yes, fervently do I wish that when you leave this retreat, the following words might be written up in your oratories wherever they might oftenest catch your eye ; "Am I changed ? Do I really wish to change ?"

Remember the Gospel : your hearts are a cultivated field, into which a fruitful seed is given—Divine grace :

a seed which should bring forth the fruits of blessing to the hundredfold. The Saviour signifies to us by the thorns and brambles which choke, and the birds which devour, the danger of relationships with the world, which mingle death-giving principles of death with this seed of regeneration and life.

When I saw you all, this morning, my children, kneeling in devout recollection before the holy altar, I asked myself whether all would be ended with these days of retreat, and whether the Church would have no cause of rejoicing over this meeting?

Come, my children, pronounce the word—change—accept it: it only requires the will. You do will: it requires you to show yourselves to be what you are; you will do so. If there has been any hesitation, any indecision in your souls, if the sacrifice has not been accomplished, this is the hour, it is never too soon, it is never too late, grace is ready, you will receive it: God awaits you and calls you.

Blessed be Thou, Lord, and deign to accept the testimony of our gratitude and love: it is Thou Who hast touched and sanctified these souls; keep them, preserve them in Thy grace; never permit them to stray from the path into which Thou hast led them. I know, my children, that you will have to carry the cross and to bear many a trial; but do you imagine that if you were to put yourselves again beneath the yoke of sin, under the weight of a life

consumed in earthly cares, you would find peace or retain grace? No, no, you must act, you must take God's side. Arm yourselves for the fight, and confront every difficulty. May prayer be your refuge, may your spiritual exercises be the primary, sacred and necessary law of your existence! Prayer, meditation, and thoughtful reading; one quarter of an hour's quiet to which you will submit in course of the day, whether you feel inclined for it or no, this is what I entreat you to give towards the salvation of your souls.

Ask God to give you courage and vigilance to practise virtue. Do many things differently from the way in which you have done them before. You are very subject to an extreme sensibility, to an extreme susceptibility; and when wounded every word which escapes from your lips is bitter and harsh. You are ignorant I know, of what pain you are giving the heart of another, you do not think of it, I feel sure, but yet you wound cruelly. Now set youself to do the very opposite of this: when you feel the irritation rising in your heart, check yourself; hasty words are on your lips; in their stead say something mild and sweet; calm the expression of your face also; the emotions of the soul are quickly betrayed by the eyes, soften them, pray and ask for that power of possessing yourself which is a gift of heaven. You must sometimes dissemble your real feelings so as to hide this inward irritation. Be at ease, for this dissimulation is not hard to practise, the combat is

the difficulty. Never forget that by dint of assiduous prayer we succeed in doing better: make a generous resolution, do not remain behindhand, do not do things by halves, for then you will never be happy, and God will not be contented with you: you know how to be exacting with others, then remember that God is exacting and jealous and that He has a right to be so: He has created you for Himself, He has placed you in the world that you may represent His sweetness and charity. Ah! be without fear and accept your mission; God has given His word, your sacrifices will be recompensed beyond all measure.

What shall I say in conclusion? I will make the same prayer that our Saviour used when addressing His Father;* "May they be all one, Lord in Thy love! may nothing separate those who are the children of Thy Heart, preserve, oh Lord! these souls whom Thou hast given me, may they be known as Thy disciples by the love which they bear one towards another." I pray, my children, that you may be clothed with this Christian spirit, that it may animate and guide you in your homes and abroad in the world. God cannot approve of that language whence indulgence and pardon seem for ever banished, of those gatherings in which the only aliment is censure and criticism. Is this your life? is this your conduct? are your feelings truly Christian? I ask you, in conscience, is there

* From the seventeenth chapter of St. John.

much to reform and to retrench in your conversations? Think over this seriously, so as to make the change secure upon which you have resolved, and merit the accession of charity so necessary for you.

You will often come to the Holy Table, for you know that Communion is the source of life. You will not lend an ear to the doctrines whose tendency is to keep you from it, but you will approach the Divine banquet with confidence and love, and withal deeply conscious of your own unworthiness. I do not bid you communicate indiscreetly, but frequently; not on account of your merits, but because of your weaknesses. Prepare yourselves and go to God in spite of your infirmities, offer Him contrition for the faults you have committed, with the will never again to repeat them; then, after having asked pardon for your sins, come and claim your daily bread; endeavour to advance in this path of sanctification, so that others may recognize in you the fruits of the tree of life; they are the invariable result of frequent communion, which sustains our weakness, restores our courage and causes virtues to grow and thrive. God has united Himself to you to-day, come often to enjoy the happiness of possessing Him, and realise this happy change for the welfare of your souls.

This is all I have to say, my children; let us bless the Lord for the graces which He has bestowed on us; I thank Him for having confided this consoling mission to me again

this year. Near to the term of my career as I am, I cannot but think of my final farewell to you all, and I bless God for having given me the occasion of once more bidding you love and serve Him: I offer Him a tribute of gratitude for these days and hours which you have passed in listening to the advice which He placed upon my lips, and I thank you for the edification which you have given me. May you live happily, and be fervent and full of confidence; this is the desire of my heart! You have my poor prayers, I will beg of the Lord to grant you all in abundance the graces most necessary for your souls, I will ask Him to put His seal upon the change which is operated in you, and I will say to you finally: "Hope, hope always, and even should this beautiful light of grace cease to shine, hope still; but above all, pray, and God will lead you as a Father by the hand, and will shower upon you His most abundant benedictions."

THE END.

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